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THE CITY OF REFUGE

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THE CITY OF REFUGE

BY

WALTER BESANT

AUTHOR OF

'ALL SORTS AND CONDITIONS OF MEN,' 'CHILDEEN OF GIBBEON,'
'THE MASTER CRAFTSMAN,' ETC.



IN THREE VOLUMES
VOL. II.

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CONTENTS OF VOL. II.

BOOK II.

AFTER FOUR WEEKS.

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. STRAWBERRIES! FINE STRAWBERRIES!	I
II. VOICES IN THE NIGHT	27
III. ON THE VERANDAH	56
IV. SINGLE ATTACHMENTS!	80
V. AN EXPLANATION	103
VI. LADY OSTERLEY'S ARRIVAL	118
VII. PROPOS D'AMOUR	137
VIII. CRITICISM	149
IX. REVOLT	173
X. FLIGHT	194
XI. MARRIAGE FOR ELEVATION	216



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THE CITY OF REFUGE

BOOK II.

AFTER FIVE WEEKS

CHAPTER I.

STRAWBERRIES ! FINE STRAWBERRIES !

ONE afternoon, about four weeks after these beginnings, a certain English traveller, whose gray hair and gray moustache proclaimed his more than fifty summers, was standing in the portico of the first hotel of Aldermanbury City, New York State. Aldermanbury is not a very important place, but a good many thousand people worry through life there ; it possesses at least one fine street ; it has its public buildings—which are new and ambitious ; it has a beautiful park ; it has a noble river, which flows past its quays and wharves ; it holds a daily

exhibition of activity and industry ; it boasts an electric tram as well as a horse tram ; it has two, or perhaps ten, daily papers ; there is a lecture-hall ; there is a college for men and women : and it is old enough to have a few houses of the eighteenth century, with a church, wooden pillars and all, actually of the seventeenth century. In all America you cannot very well expect to find a church much older than that.

It was a sizzling hot day in June ; the outlines of things quivered in the heat ; the electric cars ran clicking noisily up and down, looking like red-hot furnaces for the accommodation of the wicked ; if any man chose to walk on the sunny side it was equivalent to committing suicide—the coroner's inquest would certainly bring in that verdict ; the broad shady hall of the hotel was filled with citizens sitting about and transacting business ; they all drank iced water ; the young men tried to preserve the

stiffness of their collars scientifically by sticking a handkerchief between collar and neck. The heat, which overcomes the body and brings limpness and languor to the limbs, has in America, apparently, no such effect on the mind ; the flow of business was not arrested ; in the shops the electric fans went whizzing round and round, and then went whizzing back again ; they fanned the cheek with the burning air, but they could not cool it.

The Englishman looked up and down the street lazily. It was his second day in the place : he had seen everything there was to see ; he felt like going on to the next place. Why should he not go on ? On the other hand, why should he go on ? He had been going on for the best part of a twelvemonth. To one who goes about the world for so long there cometh in the end satiety of newness—enough of new places and new sights. This American city interested him not : on the

other hand, if he went on to Boston or New York it would be hotter and noisier, and not much more interesting. Perhaps he might as well stay there—continuance of heat when there is not noise therewith is not unpleasant, and in the evening one can drive.

The Park of Aldermanbury is a mighty pretty place—much prettier than Hyde Park, or Green Park, or even St. James's Park—with its ornamental water, its bridges, its islands and its hanging woods, and, after sunset, its countless points of fire in its millions of fireflies. The soft, cool air of this park, and stillness therewith, would be far better, he reflected, than the noise of New York, even with a drive in Central Park. Perhaps he would stay. In this irresolute condition of mind, he looked up the street and down the street, expecting nothing. He looked into the twilight of the hall, and he considered with pity the energy of drummers and those who hunt the nimble

dollar all day long ; and he admired the hotel clerk, who, alone of mankind, remains unaffected by heat or cold ; who stands while others sit ; who is never idle and seldom silent ; who works right through all the hours there are, and never has a rest or a 'let up' or a holiday ; who is never hurried, never out of temper, and always knows everything connected with the service of life, the freight of human bodies, and the times of all the trains to everywhere. At this moment, just as if time was of no consequence whatever, the hotel clerk was carefully explaining to an extremely dull lady how to get from Aldermanbury to San Francisco.

The Englishman turned lazily to the street again, thinking that perhaps a cigar would help him through the time. And he then became aware of a man slowly getting along the street on the shady side. The man was too far off for his face to be visible ; but

something indefinable in his manner of walking suggested, even at a distance, a certain street called Piccadilly.

The man drew nearer : the traveller could not choose but watch him. Why ? Perhaps because there was no one else to watch : perhaps on account of that suggestion of Piccadilly.

The man carried a large basket ; he went into the shops with his basket, evidently offering his wares for sale ; he also offered them to the passengers on the wood pavement. There were two or three remarkable points about his manner of offering the strawberries which leaped to the eyes at once. First, he did not bawl or cry his wares, like the British costermonger. Secondly, in presenting his basket to ladies he politely took off his hat with a bow. The action once more suggested Piccadilly—not that hats are not removed in the presence of ladies at the city of Alderman-

bury, but that there is a Piccadilly fashion which varies from year to year—or is it from month to month?—and this was the fashion of two years ago. Thirdly, that the man stepped like a guardsman, being as tall as any in the Household Brigade and as upright; that he carried his head as if he was a belted earl; and that he handled his basket with the left hand much as if he had been handling a sword: further, that he proffered his basket as if it was a princely gift. And then, suddenly, the traveller's thoughts flew hither and thither in the most tumble-down, topsy-turvy, absurd manner possible: they became a kind of waking nightmare: he saw this itinerant merchant standing in a drawing-room filled with people, dressed just as he was in Aldermanbury, offering his strawberries—they were strawberries in a basket—for sale to the ladies who were too well-bred to show any astonishment, and only bowed, and said

‘Thank you,’ and bought the fruit. Then he pulled himself out of this ridiculous dream, and suddenly recognised the merchant and ran out into the street and slapped that merchant on the shoulder, crying, ‘Gilbert Maryon! By the LORD! What the devil are you up to now?’

Gilbert Maryon—who was the strawberry vendor—turned his head, put down his basket, and without the least show of surprise, or shame, or confusion—yet most young men of London would be abashed at being caught in such an occupation—held out his hand with a frank smile of welcome.

‘You, Annandale! Why, what are you doing in Aldermanbury?’

‘I am going home, gradually. I have come here by degrees from San Francisco, and Chicago, and Buffalo—I have also come from Japan. I am a globe-trotter—by your leave.’

‘Certainly—with my leave.’

‘And you? What are you doing?’

‘You see—I am selling strawberries.’

‘That is what I do see—Gilbert Maryon is selling strawberries in the street! Why is Gilbert Maryon selling strawberries in the street?’

‘Strawberries, you must admit, are grown to be sold. Therefore, the end of their existence must be achieved. Someone must sell strawberries. Why not I? It is not, I believe, in any way disgraceful to sell strawberries in the street.’

‘Well, if you ask my opinion, I think it is—as one may say—mildly disgraceful. Not like some things. But still not what a gentleman should do.’

‘I have ceased to recognise the distinction.’

‘Yet it exists. Why have you abolished the distinction?’

‘They are very good strawberries,’ he went on, without answering the question.

‘Have some. They are cheaper than any you can buy in the shops; they are also fresher—I helped to pick them at six o’clock; and they are finer. We pride ourselves particularly on our strawberries, our peaches and our pears; no finer fruit of the kind is grown in the States. Our potatoes also are acknowledged to be the best in the market, and I believe that in peas and asparagus we are well to the front.’ Gilbert shovelled up a few strawberries in his scoop, and offered them to his friend. ‘Try them. I assure you that they are very fine strawberries.’

‘No, thank you. Tell me what it means.’

‘These are the strawberries of our Community.’

‘Your Community?’

‘My Community. I am at present a brother of the Community. We are monks and nuns. This is my monastic garb.’

His friend looked at it with disdain. It was a gray suit, quite simple, a jacket with

side pockets, not quite in West-End style, and a round hat.

‘It hath a reach-me-down appearance. Does the whole Community dress like this?’

‘All the men do. I wish to goodness the women did as well.’

‘What Community is it?’

‘One in which we live the life in common, like the early Christians. We live by the labour of our hands; we leave our wealth behind us when we enter. For my own part, I work in the garden. Sometimes I am sent here to sell fruit. Do have some.’

The traveller observed that, though the voice and manner were those of Gilbert of the London clubs and of London society, his face was somehow changed.

‘Old man,’ he laid a hand upon Gilbert’s shoulder, ‘what did you do it for? There is something behind this: you’ve either got a bee in your bonnet or you’ve got something up your sleeve.’

‘I can only repeat that I am, for the present at least, a member of this Community——’

‘Nevertheless——’

‘The Community is not, like some, composed of people who have found the world hollow or discovered that society is tinkling cymbals. Not at all. Don’t think that.’

‘I won’t. You find the society of the Community superior to that of London: is that the reason of your retreat?’

‘Nine-tenths of us are half-taught rustics; one or two are German enthusiasts; there is a repentant burglar or two; there is a late leader in a notorious long firm: there are one or two ladies with a tempestuous Past. These constitute our Society.’

‘What are you doing in it? Gilbert, there is something behind.’

‘It’s a very interesting Community. We do not talk; we do not read; we do not sing

hymns ; we have no chapel and no services ; we do not fast or macerate ourselves—we have, on the contrary, three square meals a day, and they are always the same : the delicious steak of the American up-country hotel, with the refined yet tasty dish called “ pork and beans,” form the principal part of each meal.’

‘ Gilbert, once again, in the name of wonder, what are you doing in this awful place ? If you cannot tell me, say so.’

He began, as men will, to think there must be a girl of some kind at the bottom of the mystery. Yet Gilbert was not a *coureur des femmes*.

‘ We meditate ; sometimes we dance ; we fall into trance——’

‘ You don’t mean to say that you’ve struck the Buddhist rubbish ?’

Gilbert shook his head. ‘ The Buddhists are not in it, my dear friend, compared with us.’

‘Well, come to the hotel, and let us sit down and have a drink.’

‘Certainly,’ said Gilbert. ‘Carry the basket for a bit, will you?’

Mr. Annandale looked to the right and to the left of him, also before him and behind him, for he was blushing like a schoolgirl, while he obeyed, and carried the basket of strawberries into the porch of the hotel.

There they sat down. Mr. Annandale produced his cigar-case.

‘Thank you,’ said Gilbert; ‘for the time I have renounced tobacco.’

‘Have a drink, then—a whisky-and-soda.’

‘Thank you,’ said Gilbert; ‘for the time I have renounced whisky.’

There was a cheerful light in his eye; there was a smile upon his lips—which showed that, in spite of these privations, Gilbert was not treating the Community very seriously. This made the other man

still more curious to understand what it meant.

‘Let me see,’ said Annandale: ‘it must be two years since you disappeared without giving notice. Two years; it was either just before or just after the breakdown of Sir Charles Osterley.’

‘Just after that event. Lady Osterley, I remember, told me about it.’

‘Yes—the divine Dorabyn. I remember you were an old ally of hers; as for me, I am only an old lover, you know. Yes—after that event. Have you heard, by any accident, where the man is and how he is?’

‘He had to go abroad, I believe,’ Gilbert replied evasively.

‘So they said—so they said. Under certain circumstances people will say anything. His own people are in the same tale. Gone abroad—gone abroad. My dear Gilbert, when a man disappears suddenly

and is no more seen, when nobody hears anything about him, when he is never met abroad, when his own people never mention him, when his wife will not talk about him with her oldest friends—meaning me—what is the conclusion?’ Mr. Annandale touched his forehead. ‘That’s the conclusion—that, and no other ; and poor Dorabyn is a widow, yet not a widow.’

‘A good many people have come to that conclusion,’ said Gilbert.

‘There can be no other conclusion. And I’m awfully sorry for poor Dorabyn—the matchless Dorabyn. He was a cold-blooded beast ; he always looked as if he was devising something dark and treacherous, but statesmanlike, such as the murder of Mr. Gladstone and the burial of the body under the stairs in the Tower. Dorabyn would have him ; threw over all her old admirers—even me, sir, me, who was old enough to be her father—in order to marry a man going to be

Prime Minister. And this is the end of her ambition. Whereas——'

'If she had married you, she would now——'

'Well, it's the month of May, isn't it? She would now be the Queen of her own world—and a mighty fine world it is. But she would have made it finer. Poor Dorabyn! She is travelling about the world with her little boy.'

'So I understood when last she wrote to me.'

'And you too have disappeared. Why?'

'There seems no reason—does there?—why I should communicate to the papers what I am doing and where I am staying. The world cares nothing about my occupations.'

'A small part of the world does care a great deal, Gilbert.'

'Thank you. Well, I came abroad—I have been travelling about for two years. That is really all there is to tell you.'

‘Oh! and this precious Community?’

‘I have not been there very long: a few weeks; the thing interests me: I don’t know how much longer I am going to stay—probably not very long.’

His friend nodded at the basket at their feet. ‘Do they make you do that every day?’

‘No; strawberries are only in season for a few weeks. I do other kinds of work. Mostly, however, I work in the garden. One of our principles is that one should not work too exclusively at one thing, or the work itself may become a hindrance by occupying our thoughts. So I sometimes make wooden traps, or turn chair legs—we are great in chair legs—in the carpenter’s shop. Sometimes I am sent into this city to sell our fruit and vegetables.’

‘Are there any gentlefolks at all where you are living?’

‘The distinction is invidious.’

‘Have they good manners?’

‘No.’

‘Is the cooking good?’

‘It is detestable.’

‘How is the wine?’

‘There is none.’

‘You are taking notes and making up a novel. Well, everybody does that nowadays.

‘I no longer read or write anything. There are no books in the House. For the attainment of the Perfect Life, which is the *raison d’être* of the House, books are found to be a hindrance.’

‘Do you propose to stay there much longer?’

A curious change fell upon Gilbert’s face, a black cloud. His eyes darkened. ‘Perhaps I may come out of it in a few days. Perhaps I may stay there longer.’

‘Are there any girls to talk with—*pour conter des fleurettes*, after the fashion of the world—your favourite amusement?’

‘There are sisters——’

‘In so large a family some of the sisters must be young.’

‘To whom we are brothers.’

‘It is a kindly tie, Gilbert. Tell me truly: do you like this abominable life? Do you really endure it with patience?’

‘Work is not degrading. There might be things much harder to endure than work. In order to carry out certain purposes one would willingly suffer much worse things than work.’

‘Well, but the change, the companionship. Remember your companions at home. Remember Dorabyn.’

Gilbert flushed suddenly. He could not tell this man that he was in the place solely for the sake of Dorabyn.

Mr. Annandale changed the subject: there was something behind; if Gilbert were really drawn by the strange doctrines of this Crankery he could not speak of the House

in this light and careless tone ; if there was nothing, why was he confused at the mention of his old friend's name ? A girl must be at the bottom of it — *Cherchez la femme ; cherchez la femme*. Perfect Life, work necessary for the Perfect Life—heard one ever such stuff and nonsense ?

They talked all the afternoon ; they went back to club-land ; they talked about people ; they talked scandal ; the last scandal but two ; the sun went down ; they dined together at the hotel—a table decently ordered and served ; they had a bottle of fair claret with the old talk. These things refresh the soul after a course of House dinner and silence withal.

It was eleven o'clock when Gilbert left the hotel.

In the morning the darky sweeping the floor found the strawberry basket which Gilbert had forgotten ; this shows that when he went away he was not thinking of his

mission : to sell those strawberries for the good of the House.

Eleven o'clock when Gilbert turned into the street ; a clear moonlight night ; the air as warm as in the day. He looked about him : the street was almost deserted ; he felt like one who has escaped from prison ; it was delightful only to be in the street among men and not in a cell among Cranks. He threw up his arms and could have shouted in the joy of momentary freedom. He strolled down the side walk. Presently he came to a cross street, at the end of it : on the right rose the public buildings of the city ; in the moonlight they looked imposing—the moon is very kind to inferior architecture as well as to ruins ; on the left the street sloped to the river ; the moonlight lay upon the broad bosom of the noble river ; half-way across there floated rather than sailed, for there was no wind, a small boat with her white sail spread—who was in that boat ? Why did

she sail at midnight? Gilbert turned down this street and stood upon the quay. Lower down were moored two big river steamers; behind the quay rose two or three saloons, their electric lamps burning brightly, and a confusion of voices showing that men were still awake.

‘I have not seen real humans for a month,’ said Gilbert. He walked over to the entrance of one place: it was a dive; he looked in; there was a bar with half a dozen men lounging around; along one side of the room was a bench where two or three men were sitting; they seemed to be seafaring men—probably connected with the river steamers. In one corner was a table with four men playing cards. Gilbert drew back suddenly. For one of the gamblers was the man who was going to—what? He knew not what would happen to that man. But something.

There he was, playing with passion and

intensity, his face drawn with excitement. The other men took their gains calmly ; this man, Charles Lee, was absorbed and carried away with it.

There was no danger of being seen by him. Gilbert stood in the shade of the entrance. He watched for a few minutes. Then he turned away. 'There goes my money,' he said, 'the money that he has stolen. And this is what our friend does all the evening! Is he not afraid? Is he going mad to venture where the police are looking for him? Will it end in his being arrested? In that case where is Dorabyn's freedom? And where is my promise? And what about that message from the skies?'

CHAPTER II.

VOICES IN THE NIGHT.

THIS unexpected meeting with his old friend—Colonel Annandale, the old friend of his father, the old friend of Dorabyn, the former friend of Charles Osterley—rudely recalled to Gilbert's mind the purpose for which he had come to this place. Further, the sight of the man for whom he came to the place, gambling with common stokers and firemen of the river steamers, also recalled to him the purpose for which he had come to this place.

If you remember, he had come to kill this man. That is to say, he would make him

fight, somehow, and either kill him or be killed himself.

A very serious purpose. It would be difficult to find a more serious purpose.

‘I go out to kill a man, or to be killed.’ It was like the Ordeal by Battle, except that in the old Ordeal the guilty man had to swear by the Living God and by the dead saints that he was innocent : a perjury which generally afflicted his heart with terror, and took the strength out of his hand and the keenness out of his sight. In this Ordeal the guilty man would not have to make any pretence or commit any perjury ; he would simply fight, his guilt being known, in order to save his life, if he could.

A very serious purpose, indeed. Yet Gilbert had managed to forget it ; or, at least, to put it out of his mind for five weeks.

It seems a good deal to forget. Yet we are all of us constantly forgetting and putting

out of sight a vast number of things, to remember which would poison the present. One could not live if one had to be always gazing back into the past, or always anticipating the future. Which of us loves to dwell, except at rare intervals, on the early days of struggle? Yet it was a healthy and invigorating time. Which of us dares to anticipate and realize the pains of eighty; the chamber of torture; the slow dragging of life out of the body by long agony? No one. We can bring ourselves to forget everything. Yet, it must be admitted, to forget such a purpose as this required considerable power of forgetting.

He had come to kill a man. The man was there, waiting to be killed: yet he had done nothing. Why? Because a girl brought him a message which she said came from the dead.

Five weeks the Message asked for—five weeks' respite. Four weeks had gone; but

one remained—only one week : the respite had been asked for on the ground of possible softening and repentance.

Every day, three times a day, the two men sat opposite each other at the table in the Hall. The man who called himself Charles Lee appeared with regularity at the common meals of the House : he took his seat with calm insolence ; he looked through his opposite neighbour as if he were not there—it was in the highest style of the best and most popular British manner : it was just as if he was taking his place at a Continental *table d'hôte* ; he sat in silence, pale, self-contained, and with the well-bred manner of superiority which still remained to him. Gilbert talked with Cicely ; neither of the two addressed a word to this man. The meal despatched, he rose and departed, silently. In the morning he pretended to work in the garden, but did nothing ; in the afternoon he strolled about under the shade trees and slept on the

benches. This silence and deliberate separation helped to make it possible for Gilbert to set his purpose on one side and to forget it. Had the man talked or blustered or pretended, the end would have been forced upon Gilbert.

It was nearly midnight when he reached the House. Lights were out: the Community were long since sleeping peacefully.

He mounted to his room, undressed quickly, and lay down.

Sleep came, and with sleep came Visions. They were terrible Visions, born of the Purpose in his mind, thus awakened and returned to him. The Visions showed him the flower gardens of the House; among the flowers moved the girl, pure and white, neither fearing evil, nor thinking evil, nor knowing evil; and beside her stood an Evil Presence—whose soul was black through and through; but it could do no harm to the

girl. And then he saw in his Visions a Figure, marching solemnly and slowly, though still at some days' distance. It was the Figure of Death himself ; not a grinning skeleton, but a strong man armed, with purpose in his face—and lo! the countenance of Death was not his own, but some other's whose face was hidden ; but the shape and the height and the carriage of the shape were like unto the shape and the height and the carriage of Sir Charles himself. The Vision was so vivid and clear that he must have been asleep, though he thought he was awake : it is only in sleep that we are enabled to receive such Visions. He sat up, trying to bring it back, especially the Vision of that Death, the Avenger who was not himself, but another. What other? Oh! a dream—a dream.

Sleep would come no more. It was a hot night ; he got up and leaned out of his open window, trying to think coherently. This

was difficult, because he was tired, and in that condition of half sleep in which the mind will not work. Only a week remained. He must resolve on something ; he must be ready for action. What ?

Dorabyn was in America. The thing must be done without further delay. How should it be done ? How should it be begun ?

First, he discovered sleepily that he could not answer that question. Then he woke up a little more and tried again. Still he could not find out any answer. Then he became quite broad awake, and yet he could not find an answer. He tried other things ; his mind was quite clear and able to work upon these ; but in this line he could not think at all—it was just as if a high brick wall stood up before him if he moved in this direction.

He looked out into the night—a dark, black, moonless night ; as breathless as, in the early summer, the State of New York

often sees the night. It was as hot as one may experience in the Red Sea at the same season ; away over the hills there flashed incessantly gleams of lightning with low growls and rumblings of thunder.

He stood leaning out of the window, watching the flashes which lit up for the moment the farm buildings and the gardens of the House ; and he wondered when this brick wall would vanish, and when he should find an answer to that question. Because, you see, it was now really necessary that an answer of some kind should be found.

His thoughts kept coming back to this question. He tried to think of other things : of the House ; of the girl Cicely, thoughtful, serious, sweet of face and firm of eye and innocent of brow ; of the men and women in trance ; of the grim and mournful listlessness which they called Recreation ; of the dulness ; of the sadness ; of the strange unreal futility of a place whose people were

nourished and kept alive by illusions and self-deceptions, like those islanders of Rabelais who fed upon wind: all these things he could think about clearly. He could even picture to himself the degradation of the man gambling in the lowest den of an American town; and the despair of the man hiding in the last place of concealment possible: the man hunted; the man disgraced. He could remember his promise to Dorabyn in her agony that he would set her free. And then? Then he could go no further. If he asked that simple question, 'How?' the high brick wall rose up before him over which he could not climb; over which he could not even look.

'What must be done shall be done, but not by you.'

It was a promise. Whose promise? Cicely said that it was the promise of a dead woman. What matter, so long as the charm acts, whether it is illogical, absurd,

contrary to reason? Charms have healed people ever since the world began. The words, like a charm, fell on Gilbert's disquiet soul. They were as the cold blade upon the burning wound of the soldier. His restlessness suddenly left him; there returned to his soul once more the sense of reliance with which Cicely had bewitched him when she first brought that message; with which the girl had held him patient and contented, for four weeks.

‘What must be done shall be done, but not by you.’

Had this thing been known to the world concerning Gilbert, who was not a visionary, nor a crank, nor a dreamer, nor a ghost-monger, but a sane and simple man, who troubled his head about no such matters—had it been spread abroad in his club that Gilbert Maryon, of all men, had yielded to such an influence, there would have been derision. But no one in any club will ever

be able to connect the name of Gilbert Maryon with this sad softening of the brain, because Gilbert Maryon keeps the story to himself.

He felt no further desire for sleep ; he continued to lean out of the window, watching the play of lightning and listening to the rumblings among the hills. The air was in that condition which unscientific people who wish to be thought scientific love to describe as 'charged with electricity.' The exact scientific description of that condition I do not know ; in common parlance, however, men speak of it as 'jumpy.' Perhaps the lightning made the night jumpy. Now, when the air is jumpy, you may experience all kinds of strange, impossible, and incredible things. A man speaks afar off ; his voice is close at your ear. You reply, your voice is far off ; the closing of a window is like the firing of a cannon. One man—a visionary, he—walking once in the

poetical neighbourhood of Bloomsbury (London, West Central), the day being Sunday, the season early summer, the time evening, the air very jumpy—it was, in fact, only five minutes before the breaking of the great thunderstorm that o'er pale Britannia passed exactly twenty-five years ago—this man, I say, heard people talking in their houses behind the closed windows—yea, heard what they said; as a proof, he reported that the language and the ideas were for the most part creeping and common. I tell this anecdote, not because I hope to be believed, though it is quite true. This Visionary has never been believed. Whenever he relates the incident allusions are made to his calling, which is that of *Raconteur* or Story-teller. Yet for once he stumbled into plain, naked truth. I tell it here because it illustrates, as pat as possible, the adventure which came to Gilbert on this night of wakefulness and

visions, and hot, still air, and general jumpiness.

It was about two o'clock in the morning—the time between the two days, when the memory of the dead day has wholly gone out of the sky and the anticipation of the new birth has not yet begun : not a time for ghosts, who come earlier or later ; when the whole world is asleep, even the watch-dog. Now please to remember, before you read what may appear incredible, the exact position of Gilbert's room in the House. The latter faced full south : in its western wing were the cells or sleeping rooms of the men ; on the west side of this wing, and on the third floor, was Gilbert's room. The eastern wing was given to the Sisters ; beyond that wing ran, open, hedgeless, straight, the road to Aldermanbury. In other words, Gilbert was as far as the position of the House would allow from any persons walking on that road.

In such a place, at such a time, in such a position, the following remarkable experience arrived to the man leaning with his head out of window.

First he heard footsteps on the road at some distance from the House : that would not, perhaps, be so very strange a thing on a metalled road, because, on such a road, a man's footsteps might be heard a long way off, in the intervals of growling thunder : but the road was not metalled ; it was a plain dusty cross-country road, used for no other purpose, at this end, than for communication with the House.

There were two distinct footsteps ; he heard them and distinguished them quite plainly : one step belonged to a man, the other to a woman. What man—what woman—could be walking along this road at such an hour ? Tramps, perhaps : but tramps never came to this House ; first, because it stood well away from the main

road ; and, next, because those tramps who had tried it reported of the place that a real bit of work had to be put in, and at least a third of a day's work before any grub was exhibited. Now, work to a tramp is like the other end of a magnet to the needle : it makes him turn and run away. The footsteps were not those of tramps. Further, it became apparent to Gilbert that the feet were moving in different directions.

Gilbert listened curiously ; his senses were strangely quickened, yet he neither marvelled nor asked how he came to hear and to understand things so far off. As for the footstep of the man, though it was still a long way off, on the other side of the House, still on the road which led to the city of Aldermanbury, he recognised it as that of the man who called himself Charles Lee.

‘He is coming home after his gambling bout. He has lost all my money,’ said Gilbert.

The other footstep, that of the woman, was in that road also, going to meet this man.

‘What woman is it? What can she want with this man in the dead of night?’ He listened again with curiosity. Surely, surely—the footstep of the girl Cicely. Of Cicely! Then he leaned out of window and listened with all his ears. What was Cicely, the child Cicely, doing with this fallen gentleman in the middle of the night? The flashes of lightning lit up the farm buildings and the gardens; but they could not show him this couple meeting in that road on the other side of the House.

But he could hear. He heard not only footsteps but also words.

Outside, the man Charles Lee was walking home to his retreat. Night after night he ventured forth in the darkness to a den frequented by certain persons of the baser sort, where, if he could show a single dollar,

he could gamble as long as the money held out. This evening he was returning home stone broke. It has been indicated how he was able to find money for the last gamble : that plunder was now, after four weeks' changes and chances, mutabilities and variations, entirely vanished, and he knew not where to turn for more. He walked slowly ; he hated walking along the rough and dark road—it was four long miles from Aldermanbury to the House which he loathed but could not leave. All day long he devised plans for disguise and escape ; yet what disguise would hide him ? And where could he find any disguise ? Spectacles, a red wig, a beard, a patch over one eye ; but how to get these things ? And when he had them, where to go without money ? And every day and all day long his heart failed him for fear and rage, because he saw no way of escape and no choice but to stay where he was.

Presently, when the House was almost in sight, Brother Charles heard footsteps approaching. And he stopped with a great curse upon his lips.

‘That girl again!’ he swore. She drew nearer. ‘She is mad. She is put up by that damned Maryon fellow! She tries to frighten me.’ He had made up his mind by this time that Gilbert, too, was a refugee, and that he would not bring the police to the House for his own sake. ‘Frighten me,’ he repeated. ‘To frighten me away!’ He straightened himself and walked on with resolution. The man was truly a most deplorable and a most disgraceful creature, but he was not to be alarmed by bogies.

Then the girl met him, clad in a white dressing gown, with no hat. She stood before him and threw out her arms to bar the way.

‘Well? You are here again? Do you think I shall take you for a ghost?’ asked

Charles Lee. 'What is the meaning of this play-acting? Are you not afraid to come out by yourself in the middle of the night? Are you going to give me some more messages from dead people? Pray do not trouble. The dead, my girl, sleep very still. They know nothing that is done. They neither hear nor speak, nor understand anything.'

'I am sent, Brother Charles.'

'Sent!' he repeated. 'Once for all, I am not the man to be moved by rubbish of that kind. Confess that young Maryon sent you. He wants to get me out of the place. Why does he want me to go? You girl—Cicely—go and tell him that I won't interfere with him if he lets me alone. If he won't——'

'I am sent,' she repeated. 'You have hitherto paid no heed. I am sent to tell you that the allotted time is well-nigh over; there remain but six days; and then——'

'What then?'

‘When a man has done all the evil that he is permitted to do, when there is no more hope that he will forget the Past, he is called away.’

‘You mean that I am going to die in a week? Perhaps. But how am I to die? I am perfectly well; as well as this infernal place will let me be.’

‘You are such a man,’ said Cicely, without answering his words. ‘You will not be permitted to do any more evil.’

‘If you were a man!’ he replied weakly.

Then she raised her hand and became like the Master, a Prophet. ‘You will not forget the Past: you are tied with a chain of shame and wickedness: you feel the shame, you cannot feel the wickedness; that is your punishment already: it will be a part of your next existence that you will feel the misery yet not be able to give up the cause. Oh! you must sink far, far below this present life: you have I know not how much

trouble and suffering to undergo before you can rise again to what you were in the days of your youth. Only a week left ; and then —Charles Osterley——’

‘What?’ he cried. ‘Who told you my name?’

‘You will suffer what men call death.’

‘Who told you my name? Was it Maryon? What do you know about me?’

‘That you will die, Charles Osterley. There are still before you six days. There is yet time to cut the chain and to forget the Past.’

She turned and left him, speeding swiftly home. The man stood still, pale and trembling. The sound of his own name, which he had not heard since he went out of the presence of the man whose name he had forged, made him tremble. The after story was nothing — only followed as a corollary on the first : that he had become rogue and sharper and conspirator was

nothing, compared with the memory of that forgery.

Gilbert, from his window, listened. The girl's voice ceased ; he heard her light footstep as she returned to the House. The man for some time remained still. Was he terrified ? Was he moved ? Was there any hope at all that he could, if he would, forget the past ?

Presently his footstep was heard again ; but it was slow and heavy, as of one oppressed with weariness or heaviness of mind. It reached the House ; it passed along the gravel walk before the House ; it reached the entrance to the wing, which stood open day and night ; it came slowly up the stairs ; it passed along the corridor. Gilbert left the window and turned to the door. That night — that very night — he would tell him all, and why he came : he would warn him and bid him prepare. But his hands in the dark fell upon the bare wall

of the room ; he groped about, feeling for his door : he could not find it. The wall of the room was exactly like the wall which stood between him and the answer to that question. It would not suffer him to pass through in order to get at the man. Gilbert desisted : you cannot fight a brick wall ; he lay down and fell fast asleep.

In the morning the thing was like a dream of the night. Cicely greeted him in the garden with her serious smile.

‘You should look tired this morning, Cicely,’ said Gilbert. ‘You had a broken night. Yet you look as fresh and as sweet as one of your own rosebuds.’

‘I had a very good night, Gilbert. I always sleep well.’

‘Oh!’ It was, then, as he knew beforehand, a trance or a sleep-walking. ‘Did dreams visit you?’

‘Dreams? Yes, I dreamed about Brother Charles.’ She shuddered and looked round.

‘To think about him gives me a kind of sore throat : it pains me only to look at him. Oh ! Gilbert, his soul is black through and through. What does he stay here for ? Something will happen to him—I am sure that something will happen to him.’

‘I think it very probable — more than probable.’

‘His heart is full of hatred and of fear : I feel it when he sits beside me in the Hall. Perhaps he will be criticised.’

‘You are a witch, Cicely. Will criticism—which I take to be a fearless expounding of one’s faults—quite meet the case?’

Cicely shook her head. ‘It must be a dreadful thing,’ she said, ‘to be criticised.’

Gilbert laughed. ‘I do not think the criticism of the Fraternity would be very formidable. However, you do not always dream about this nigger heart. Have you no more pleasant dreams?’

‘Oh yes. I dream of you sometimes.’

And my mother always talks to me every morning. When you have quite forgotten the Past, Gilbert, and can meditate like us, you will be able to talk to your own mother, perhaps.'

'Perhaps. And to dream of you, Cicely, which would be very delightful.' He looked round the garden. The man Charles Lee was not there. 'Where is our cheerful neighbour, the Black heart? He came home so late last night that doubtless he sleepeth: much the same sort of sleep, no doubt, as is granted to the White heart. Don't you think it *was* very late?'

No; she remembered nothing. 'I don't know,' she said. 'I suppose you went to bed at the usual time?'

Gilbert changed the subject. 'Cicely, do you remember bringing me a message? I was invited to postpone a certain purpose for five weeks. Do you remember?'

'Yes, I remember something about it.'

‘Do you know what the purpose was?’

‘No.’

‘Did you connect that message with the man—of whom you dreamed, last night?’

‘No.’

Then the breakfast bell clanged and clashed.

‘We will talk about this, later on, in Recreation,’ he said.

Brother Charles was late in Hall. Something seemed to have happened to him. He was always pale; this morning he looked white; his eyes were underlined: not that he had lost anything of the Grand Manner—that is, consistent with trembling hands, with meaning or suspicious glances: even the greatest man, Charlemagne himself, could be suspicious at times. Yet there was something in his manner, to one who knew the truth, as of the hunted creature, nearing the spot where he will stand at bay.

In the garden, after breakfast, he wandered about aimlessly, carrying a hoe and

doing no manner of work. Presently, with an evident effort, he accosted Cicely, who was among her flowers.

‘Tell me,’ he said—‘I have, I suppose, the right to ask—how you have managed to learn my name? What I want to know is—who told you? and what has he told you besides?’

‘I do not understand,’ she answered, wondering. ‘Your name? It is Charles Lee. What more is there to know?’

Either the most consummate actress in the world, or perfectly ignorant and innocent. Was she sleep-walking? Yet could there be such sleep-walking as would reveal a hidden name?

‘Come,’ he said. ‘It is your humour not to understand. Suppose we put it in another way. Why have you been meeting me every night for the last week and more in the dead of night, bringing your pretended warnings and prophecies?’

‘Brother Charles!’ Cicely answered in amazement, ‘you are wandering in your wits. Indeed, you look ill. Had you not better lie down, and, if you can, seek forgetfulness in Meditation?’

‘No—no. But you met me last night—again—in the middle of the night.’

‘How could I meet you in the middle of the night? You are dreaming. In the middle of the night you are in your room and I am in mine. Your words are foolish. Go away and lie down. Perhaps the sun has touched your head.’

‘I believe it is a House of Ghosts,’ said Mr. Charles Lee. He shouldered his hoe. ‘You are all ghosts together.’ He turned away, but came back again. ‘Do not imagine,’ he said, ‘that I am afraid of ghosts, or of madness, or of mad women, or of sham messages. But about that name—how did you learn my name?’

‘Go away, and lie down,’ said Cicely, ‘till

the fit has left you. All this, Brother Charles, is part of the Past which you will never even try to forget. One of these days they will criticise you. I am sure they will ; and then — oh ! I don't know what will happen then.'

He looked into her serious eyes—*was* the girl a consummate actress ? How else could she pretend not to know about these nightly meetings ? He looked across the garden and saw Gilbert working among the strawberries. Of course they were in collusion.

'You refuse to answer me,' he said. 'As you please, then ; I have no more to say. Do not, however, bring me any more sham messages.'

CHAPTER III.

ON THE VERANDAH.

GILBERT deferred further explanation till after Recreation.

It was Cicely's custom at this time to remain behind and to talk awhile with the Master. It was the time that in her father's life belonged to him. It is not good for a child to grow up altogether in silence; and when he died the Master carried on the custom. What did they talk about? Indeed, one knows not. The flowers, the birds, the sky, the other world chiefly, I think—the other world, which thus became to the girl as real as this. She saw it plainly:

a world very much like her own ; a garden closed, roses in profusion, lilies red and white and yellow, the distant hills yellow with the golden rod ; and on the lawns and under the shade of the trees her father and her mother, whom they called, while still on their earthly pilgrimage, Brother Raymond and Sister Alice. They were in white—the old Baptist's early reading gave him a New Jerusalem, in which the saints were clothed in white ; but he turned the city of the jasper gates into another House of Trance, and the place of a thousand joys into another pilgrimage to another New Jerusalem. But the child saw it all so plainly that when she joined the rest in Meditation she flew off without the least delay and embraced her mother and kissed her father and held high and saintly discourse, insomuch that when the time came to return it was with a glowing cheek, a beating heart, and a humid eye. All this she got, I believe, from this after-dinner talk.

And as for the Master, though he very properly insisted on the loneliness of each individual—each standing in the Universe apart and alone—in the society of this young girl, the daughter of the House, he even forgot for the moment that loneliness of Elevation which he proclaimed and preached.

Again, every prophet must have his favourite ; his feminine believer and disciple. It is impossible to be complete as a prophet without a favourite. Mohammed had Kadijah ; St. Francis of Assisi had Lady Clare ; every vicar has his pew-opener ; the Master of the House of Trance had one woman whom he specially loved and who entirely believed in him. To this good and faithful disciple the Prophet confided everything ; he clothed, for her eyes first, his visions in words ; in her simple and unquestioning faith he found a reflection of his own ; and because it was so unquestioning and so simple, his own faith

was strengthened and his own confidence in his own Mission was proved to be founded on the solid rock. But for this afternoon talk the girl, before Gilbert arrived, had no opportunity of speech at all. But for this she might have lost altogether the power of speech, as some of the men had done, simply for want of practice. One may very well forget how to talk if one remains silent long enough. There is the leading case of Alexander Selkirk. People who live much alone become unready with words; the mind works, but no record is made by word of mouth concerning its operations. It is interesting to reflect that thus the greatest discoveries may have been made and lost, simply because the discoverer could not speak, or read, or write. Cicely, in this way, preserved the (possibly) useful faculty of speech; yet she spoke little and always slowly and with thought, as if words were precious, and not to be wasted and lightly thrown about.

This day the Master remained as usual sitting in his armchair. Cicely sat at the end of the bench, her head on her hand and her left arm on the table.

‘You look troubled, dear Master,’ she said. ‘Your eyes are full of trouble.’

‘There is something in the House, child, that pains me. I know not what it is. It jars and frets ; something that concerns our peace and tranquillity.’

‘Indeed, Master, I know of nothing. Everything is quiet. For the moment, I suppose, they are nearly all asleep.’

It has been explained that most of the Community thus interpreted the uses of Recreation.

‘No,’ he went on fretfully. ‘There is something that threatens. I feel it, though I cannot tell you what it is. I have asked your mother about it.’

‘What does she say ?’

‘I cannot remember all she says. We

are imperfect—the best of us. I cannot remember, much as I desire to remember. She told me what to expect. But I have forgotten. Yet I remember her assurance that it should not be allowed to drag me down. That is everything ; I ought to ask no more.'

'Then, Master, why should you vex yourself about it? Nothing can hurt you that does not drag you down.'

'It may drag others down. I look round the Hall, dear child, and I like to think of their souls as I knew them when they first came ; so simple they were then, and so common and uncultivated, most of them. And I like to think of them rising by means of Meditation to heights unknown Outside, where they must needs, in order to rise at all, call in the aid of services and sermons. Well, it is to pass without harm to me—and without harm to you. I remember so much, Cicely. I remember, too, that your mother

is concerned very strangely with Brother Gilbert. She talks to me about him. It is a good thing for him that he came here. Something troubles him, but it will pass : he is to possess his soul in patience. Why she is interested in Gilbert, I cannot tell you. Hush !'—he sat up and listened, his eyes suddenly gazing into space. 'Go, dear child, go—she calls me. I hear her voice. Alice, I come—I come.'

His head fell gently back ; his eyes became fixed : he was in Trance again.

Gilbert waited for Cicely on the verandah with the greater part of the Community. It was no afternoon for croquet on the lawn, even if anybody had been willing to play ; the sun was too fierce and the air too hot. Many of the members were sitting on the long, low bench that ran round the deep verandah : they were mostly fast asleep. Beyond the lawn, under the trees, sat others, also fast asleep. One or two paced the floor of

the verandah, restlessly, not together, not talking, but separate and apart ; there was no murmur of voices, no sound of talk, no rustling of whispers ; every soul was consciously alone, selfishly absorbed ; to each, amidst the crowd, the others did not exist at all. And their faces were so heavy, so vacuous, that Gilbert's heart was filled with pity for them and for the experiment and the doctrine.

Among those who walked up and down the verandah was a woman—still young—apparently under thirty. She was a big-boned woman, tall and angular, with no figure to speak of. The dress of the sisters seemed to suit her, hideous as it was ; her hair was cut quite short ; she had no ornament at her throat ; and she walked with something of the firm and plodding step of the farmer. Her features were shaped with a rougher, even ruder, handling than is generally considered suitable for a young

woman ; it was essentially a hard face, such as belongs to one of a hard and narrow creed, belonging to a family of that old Puritan stock which for generations has known no life without struggle and endurance ; which has forgotten whatever desire for or knowledge of beauty it ever possessed — whether beauty of form or thought or expression ; of music, poetry, or art. The face of the woman was resolute, hard, and keen ; yet the eyes, as becomes a member of the Community, could soften and become the eyes of a dreamer : all the members of the Community had this dreamy eye at times ; it was their common possession ; they could be classed and recognised by their eyes ; without the possibility of the dreamy eye the crank became impossible. With some the dreamy habit betrayed itself in a soft and limpid eye, like Cicely's ; with this woman, even at her dreamiest, which was just at the commence-

ment of Meditation, her eye retained something of its hardness. It was as if at that hallowed moment there was something to be endured—something of the struggle of New England life.

The name of this saint was Phœbe—Sister Phœbe ; she sat in Hall on the right hand of Mr. Charles Lee ; therefore nearly opposite to Gilbert. She never spoke at meals ; seldom at any other time. Her work lay in the farm, among the poultry and in the dairy. No one could equal her in the rearing of these interesting creatures or in the management of the eggs. No one could approach her for butter, cheese, or cream ; and she was not unacquainted with the common pig. She worked every day with honest zeal and energy ; she loved the work ; she believed in the House ; there was not any member of the whole Community who better understood the Rule and the day's routine, and what it meant, from Fatigue,

which began it, its every Restoration, Recreation, Elevation, and Meditation, down to Retirement, which ended it. She loved the Rule ; she loved the House ; she wanted no change—until there came to the House a disturbing element, in the shape of a young man of strange and unusual make.

This afternoon she walked backwards and forwards restlessly, her mind evidently agitated by some troubling of the peaceful waters. From time to time she glanced at Gilbert ; then she turned away ; then she glanced again ; her eyes were full of hesitation and of doubt. She looked, and turned her head, and looked again. These little indications might have been legible to any who understand the simple voice of Nature. And she drew nearer, gradually, to the strange young man of unusual appearance and speech ; it was as if she could not choose but draw nearer. She gradually approached him, still with hesitation in her

manner and in her look, and still with rebellious turnings of the head and eyes.

‘Brother Gilbert,’ she began at last, abruptly; and as she spoke her cheek became aflame and she stopped short.

‘What is it, Sister Phœbe?’ True to the principles of the House, Gilbert, entirely occupied in his own reflections, which concerned Cicely, had paid no attention to these symptoms.

‘It has been in my mind to warn you, for a long time——’ and she stopped again.

‘To warn me—for a long time,’ he repeated.

‘That we do not encourage frivolous conversation. I overhear you every day at Restoration engaging in frivolous talk with Sister Cicely—about Outside. It is not good for us to talk, or think, about Outside. It agitates the mind.’

‘Serious conversation is, I believe, held to be permissible.’

‘It may be improving if it leads to Elevation. Let me talk seriously with you.’

The ice once broken, the fires of modesty left her cheek. She became once more cold and hard.

‘Shall we sit down?’ asked Gilbert. ‘Sitting down may be frivolous. On the other hand, when accompanied by such serious talk as yours——’ He sighed, and took a seat on the bench.

She sat down and folded her hands and straightened herself. She looked very, very straight.

‘We do not encourage Single Attachments,’ she began. ‘They are accounted in this House to be injurious.’

‘Indeed! I think I have heard of that superstition.’

‘We come here,’ she added, ‘for Elevation, not for Single Attachments.’

‘That is, I suppose, your reason for coming here.’

‘ They do say, in the Laundry, where you can’t prevent talk, that you and Brother Charles are two English noblemen, obliged to quit your country on account of your dreadful profligacy.’

‘ Really ! That is what they say in the Laundry ? They have an excellent motto in the Marischal College of Aberdeen—I recommend it for Laundry use, with Cleaver’s soap, unless you prefer Pears’, to rub it in. ‘ It is this : “ They say—what do they say ? Let them say.” ’

‘ Not that we mind what you have been. There’s a heap of wickedness behind us in this House. But it is all forgotten. Even a British nobleman is welcome here if he forgets the Past. I hope you have forgotten the Past, Brother Gilbert ?’

‘ One cannot always forget the Past. Besides, that of a British nobleman is too awful for anything. Let us try to forget as much as possible—all the uninteresting

bits, at least. You, Sister Phœbe, without doubt had nothing to forget.'

She considered a little.

'No,' she replied, perhaps with some regret. 'I've nothing much to forget. I was never one of the scoffers. I came here because I wanted quiet.'

'You wanted quiet? Strange! I thought that you all wanted as much noise as ever you can possibly get: doors that bang in railway carriages; bells that ring and ding and cling and clang along the street; electric cars that click. But you, actually alone of your country's women, wanted quiet!'

'I wanted to be alone sometimes. There was no loneliness at home. We had crowds in chapel; crowds in Sunday-school; crowds to prayer-meeting; crowds in the workrooms; even at night I couldn't be alone in a bedroom to myself. So I came here to be quiet, all alone with my own soul. And the Master took me in.'

‘Your soul and you. The pair of you.’

‘I wanted to be quiet. So I came here. I never knew what happiness meant till I came here.’

‘Here you are quite lonely in a crowd. I should have thought—but it doesn’t matter. I suppose if you were to marry it would be in order to become more lonely. But of course the sisters do not marry?’

‘Some do. Oh, yes! And some say it helps Elevation. I might marry’—she looked at him strangely—‘I might marry, I say, if I found a man who would help in Elevation.’

‘Who would make himself a ladder. You would climb up your husband?’

‘There’s ways. Outside, it’s good to have a husband to work for the house. Here it may be good—I don’t know—to have a husband just as a kind of support. Sometimes one feels lonesome. Sometimes it’s good to talk about your experiences, and

there's no one here who cares to listen. A husband would have to. That's his duty.'

'Yes. And what would the husband get by it?'

'Brother Gilbert—he'd get ME! What more would the man have?'

'Ah! That, indeed!' said Gilbert, in his softest, most sympathetic voice. 'That, indeed!'

'Brother Gilbert'—she laid her hand, a rough and osseous hand, upon his, and a strange and terrifying softening came into her eyes—'we must talk again. I think you want some one to be pulling you up all the time. By yourself you'll never get up, you're that light in your talk. Sister Cicely is a good girl, but she hasn't begun real Elevation, not yet. She wouldn't be any use to you at all. Besides, we don't allow of Single Attachments. If you got to be thinking all day about Cicely, you would never rise; you'd just sink down, ever so much down.'

‘Well, but when a man is married Attachments begin. That’s the proverb.’

‘There’s no Single Attachments in this House,’ she repeated, ‘married or not. Remember that. There is Selection, not Attachment. If I were to think of marriage, Brother Gilbert’—again that incongruous softening of the face fell upon her: Gilbert shuddered and sprang to his feet—‘I should want one quite different from my own people, so as I could never fall back into the old grooves. He should talk different; he should think different; he should talk gentle and soft, like you—and he should have parlour manners all the time.’

‘You like parlour manners? So do I, Sister Phœbe. I think you ought to be married, if the laws of the Community allow it. You should marry a man, say, like Brother Silas. He isn’t a bit like the people you remember, I am sure: they were spry, he is dull; he has always lived in loneliness,

not in crowds ; and he knows the people you remember, I dare say, if you come to examine him. He would every day illustrate for you the difference between kitchen manners and town manners.'

'I wasn't — just — exactly — thinking of Brother Silas,' said the maiden, with the strangest possible touch of maidenly modesty.

But Gilbert turned on his heel and walked away.

At the other end of the verandah he found the little lady whose peace of mind he had disturbed on the very first day.

She looked up from her knitting ; laughed cheerfully, and motioned him to sit down beside her on the bench.

'Come and talk,' she said, smiling graciously. 'It does me good to have a talk with you. Why, since you came here it hasn't been the same place. You shall stay always, and always, and always.'

'No, my dear.' Gilbert's charm with the

other sex partly lay in his consideration for all alike, young and old, pretty and plain, one with another—he called this little lady ‘my dear,’ and she liked it. ‘I do not think I shall stay here always, or much longer.’

‘Are you really, Gilbert, as they say, a British nobleman in disguise, run away from the people you have ruined by your horrible profligacy?’

‘Do I look like a profligate peer?’

‘No, you don’t. So I told them. Though how they got to think so, I don’t know. I should like to see, just for once, a British nobleman—a real, downright wicked one.’

‘I’m afraid he won’t come this way. Now, tell me, you have quite left off forgetting?’

‘Oh, yes! Quite. That’s all gone. At first I thought it would be terrible to be remembering again what I had such trouble in putting away. I thought it would just spoil Meditation.’

‘Well?’

‘It hasn’t, not worth talking about. Brother Gilbert, if you’d been the Master himself you couldn’t have helped me more. Why, every afternoon I live in the Past again, and at night I meditate better than ever.’

‘That’s brave. Is it a very miserable Past?’

‘You’ve got such a way with you that one can talk. I can’t talk to those stocks and stones.’ She pointed to the vacuous ones who wandered about or slept on the bench. ‘Well, I said to myself, “What is past is past. He can’t come back to me, because he’s married the other one”—Mamie she was. So I set to work to remember again—and as I don’t know what they did nor how they fared, after they married, I’ve been making up ever since. And now I seem to know all just exactly what happened. It’s twenty years ago: Mamie’s got half a dozen children, and Jacob’s partly bald and

partly gray. As for flesh, he was always inclined to put it on. And it actually makes me happy just to feel that they're happy.'

'How can you feel it?'

'Young man, if you ever loved anybody—same as I loved Jacob—you'd understand how. So you see, I do forget the Past. I've buried the Past. But I go along with my dear friend in the Present. And oh! my dear boy, I don't feel bitter nor angry, nor revengeful, any more.'

Then she showed how radical had been the change in her, for she became what every woman Outside is—a matchmaker.

'I've got my eyes back again,' she said, 'as well as my memory. Oh, yes—I see things, I see things every day.' She nodded her head and laughed, and looked whole comedies.

'What things do you see? You are a very crafty, cunning, and dangerous creature. I must take care. What things do you see?'

‘I see things,’ she repeated. ‘In the garden, under the shade trees, at meals in Hall, at Recreation and at Restoration. Oh! I like to see things; only, Gilbert, my dear boy, be careful. Don’t be too open. There’s dangers. It’s a very rigid rule with the Master—he’s hard as rock about it—there must be no Single Attachments. The only way for you to get her is to pretend that you’d rather not. I shall warn her, too. She shows her feelings by her eyes. Oh! she follows you about, Brother Gilbert; if you tamper with that poor girl—I’ll—I’ll stick a knitting-needle into you. I will indeed! But you’re not that sort, you dear boy, are you?’

‘No. I’m not that sort, where Cicely is concerned.’

‘There’s dangers abroad. Brother Silas, he wants her himself; he’s just sick for the girl. You think he’s a fool: he isn’t; only he won’t speak; he’s just finding out by

degrees that he's a man, and he's as obstinate as a Western mule. Speak to the Master, quick, Gilbert, or it may be too late. Then there's Sister Phœbe—I saw her just now talking to you. Take care—take care! She's falling in love with you fast. And she's quite ready to pretend that it is no Single Attachment: she's that cunning, and mean, and artful. Worse than Silas, because it's the nature of a man to yearn after a pretty girl. Take care, Gilbert, and speak to the Master quickly. She's a strong woman, and she'll do her best to get what she wants. That's you, my dear boy—you—nothing short of you.'

He laughed and patted her hand again. And at that moment Cicely came out of the Hall.

CHAPTER IV.

SINGLE ATTACHMENTS !

CICELY came out of the Hall and looked around, shading her eyes with her hand, for the sunlight outside was dazzling. Then she saw Gilbert, and with a nod and a smile she put on her straw hat and came across the lawn to the shade trees beyond. Her nod and her smile were a direct invitation to follow. In fact, she meant that invitation which in the innocence of her heart was not coquetry or part of a flirtation, but an acknowledgment before all the world that she desired Gilbert's society and found it delightful.

Brother Silas saw this invitation, and he

became red in the cheeks and dangerous in the eyes.

Sister Phœbe saw it, and her mouth closed with firmness.

Sister Euphemia saw it, and she smiled ; then she looked at Sister Phœbe and she smiled again, but, as heralds say, with a difference.

Gilbert would have followed, but was met by Brother Silas, who without a word held out his arms and barred the way. He would have spoken ; he was most desirous of expressing his feelings and views on the subject ; he wrestled with his memory, but in vain ; he had not spoken at all for many months, and the words refused to come ; he could not remember the right words—the words which should have been used to explain his unexpected action. Neither tongue nor brain would work. His face was red and his aspect was threatening. It looked for the moment like a fight.

‘Friend Silas,’ said Gilbert, ‘what the devil do you mean by sticking your arms out like a windmill?’

‘Single Attachments,’ Silas followed it up at last with an immense effort. ‘Single Attachments,’ he repeated. ‘Single Attachments,’ he said a third time—because no other words suggested themselves. Remember that he had not spoken for months.

‘Dear me!’ Gilbert replied sweetly. ‘Are you contemplating a Single Attachment?’

‘I hate a Britisher.’ It was a very, very weak thing to say—it had nothing to do with the business in hand; but it was the first sentence that offered: he had been taught and encouraged from childhood to entertain this tender feeling towards his trans-Atlantic cousins; he had it rubbed into him as a schoolboy in the State of Maine, to which he belonged. And they were the readiest words that occurred to him.

‘Do you?’ Gilbert replied. ‘Well; but that is such a very common feeling with your class that it hardly deserves remark, does it? The symptom presents, I assure you, nothing unusual. Will you lower your arms and stand out of my way?’

‘No,’ said Silas. ‘You shan’t follow her. I’ve seen you’—he partially recovered the gift of speech—‘I’ve watched you. No—you shan’t follow her.’

‘Silas—you are a big man and a strong man. When I hit out you will probably hit back, and there will be a free fight such as this House has never before witnessed. It will be a fight fit to wake up these sleepers. Now I put it to you with fraternal affection: if you want to fight, just stay where you are. If you don’t want to fight, get out of my way. Fighting, I am told, is, on the whole, a hindrance to Meditation, also Elevation. It is said to be even worse than a Single Attachment.’

The man growled, but lowered his arms and stood aside. His face, which commonly resembled that of the labouring and patient ox, became that of the bull, and in his dull eyes there shone an unusual light which meant jealousy, rage, revenge, with a little hatred, envy, wounded pride, and a few other passions, all incongruous as regards Elevation. Still, he stood aside and growled, inarticulate.

Do you suppose the bull who growls on the other side of the hedge would not much rather speak if he could? Of course he would.

‘The man is jealous,’ Gilbert thought. ‘He desires that pearl to be thrown unto him—unto him! And Phœbe—poor thing! She’s jealous, too! Phœbe! Sister Phœbe—the love-smitten virgin! Phœbe! After all, there are two human creatures at least in the House quite ready to create a new Past with the greatest rapidity possible.’

‘Come away from this place, Cicely,’ he said. ‘There are too many of our people about. I want to talk to you seriously. Come with me beyond the farm. I know a place where there is a shelter from the sun beside the stream. Nobody ever goes out there except myself. There we will sit and talk.’

You have already heard of the stream which ran past the House. It came down from the wooded hills a mile or two on the north of the estate ; its waters, cold as ice and clear as crystal, ran swiftly over a shallow bed of gravel, winding in and out, here and there ; on one side were the woods ; on the other bank rose a low cliff, sometimes advancing to the water’s edge, sometimes receding and leaving between rock and river tiny plains grass-covered. Over the cliff behind hung wild vines and brambles.

To one such spot Gilbert led Cicely ; in

the middle of the little meadow stood a boulder for a seat ; at the back the rock jutted out and formed a natural table or shelf which, for reasons which you will presently learn, Gilbert will remember for the rest of his natural life. The cliff at this place faced north-east, and cast a deep shade over the grass ; the hanging vines and the woods on the other side of the stream made a grateful and refreshing greenery ; the cliff and the trees on either side closed in ; the stream flowed chattering and babbling over its bed ; the fish darted about, backwards and forwards ; there was no sound of birds this hot afternoon from the woods ; the ground was broken and stony, so that no one ever came to clear away the trees ; there was no road to the place. The two were quite alone.

Cicely sat down on the boulder and took off her hat. Gilbert stood over her silent. They remained in silence while one might count a hundred.

‘I know this place, Gilbert,’ she said. ‘I used to come here when I was a child. I used to come here all by myself to find out what Outside was like. I thought the whole world was desert and solitary except our House.’

‘Why do you not come here again, sometimes?’

‘I don’t know. I suppose that I am no longer curious about Outside. Yet I like you to tell me things. It does not disturb me in the least when you tell me about Outside.’

‘Surely, dear child, you want sometimes to get away from the ugly House and the ugly people in it.’

She turned her large, serious eyes upon him with reproach and wonder.

‘Ugly, Gilbert? Why do you call them ugly? There are a hundred of them and more; and they are all mounting upwards.’

‘Are they mounting upwards? It is good

for you to believe it, at any rate. But the House is ugly. You will admit so much.'

'I don't know what you would have, Gilbert.'

'No, you don't, that is the curious thing. There is no beauty in the place except your own; and you know of none except the beauty of your own soul. Strange! To grow up without any knowledge of beauty—no art, no music, no poetry, and to become—what you have become.'

'My mother teaches me, Gilbert.'

'Yes. And not to know even what a lovely face means.'

'Well, but you can tell me, Gilbert.'

'Do you think, for instance, that Phœbe has a lovely face?'

'I don't know. Oh, Gilbert, what does it matter about faces? The Master's face is lovely to me. So is yours. What is the good of thinking whether a face is beautiful or not?'

‘Outside, my child, a lovely face is considered by the woman who possesses it as a very great treasure indeed ; far above rubies and more to be desired than much fine gold. Don’t you *like* to get away from them all?’ Gilbert insisted with a kind of jealousy.

‘No. Why should I? They belong to me, and I to them, as much as one person can belong to another. Of course, with the Master it is different. He takes me with him to talk with my mother.’

‘But what is the good, when you forget what is said?’

‘Sometimes I remember a little. I gave you my mother’s message, some time ago. You see I remembered that.’

‘What message did you give to Brother Charles last night—yesterday?’

‘None. Why do you ask? He came to me this morning and asked the same question.’

‘You do not remember receiving or giving any message?’

‘No.’

It was impossible to doubt this assurance. Such a girl could not possibly deceive others.

‘Gilbert, you are still hostile to this man—I don’t know why, except because he is a bad man who won’t forget his Past ; but you are not so troubled about him as you were. Your mind is more tranquil than it was.’

‘He does not trouble me much. Only occasionally. Your message, if you remember, bade me wait for five weeks. Four have passed. There remain only six days—after to-day, five days. Sometimes I doubt, Cicely. Sometimes I ask whether that message was really from your mother.’

‘Oh ! but since she sent that message, how can you doubt ? Of course it came from her. Oh, Gilbert ! you cannot doubt my mother. Have faith. Whatever was promised will be done. Have patience.’

‘I come to this House.’ Gilbert ad-

dressed the running brook, which carried his words to the Atlantic, where they were sucked up by the sky and carried across the ocean and there fell in rain upon the thirsty earth, whence, no doubt, they got into the papers. 'I come here with a certain very important purpose. On the very first day I receive a message from a damsel—a very charming damsel—to——'

'Do you mean me, Gilbert? Why do you call me charming?'

'Because you have charmed away my senses, so that for your sake, Cicely, I would throw away the world. You command—and I obey.'

She looked at him in wonder unspeakable. What could he mean?

'You tell me to wait, although it is a most serious and important business—and I do wait. You tell me that it is a message from the dead, and I believe it. I actually believe it. A message from the dead to me! And

I believe it! Why? Because it comes through you. Cicely, if you bade me drown myself in the stream in your mother's name, I should do it. Because I cannot doubt you. It is impossible.'

'If the message had to do with Brother Charles, believe it all the more. For your mind grows black whenever you think of him.'

'A mind is white, Cicely, according to you, or it is black. That is elementary. Some day—soon—I will teach you that the mind of a man is very seldom black, and never white. Some minds are variegated; some minds vary; some are quite pretty in their colours—azure blue, emerald green, rosy red, violet, green, golden yellow; some sparkle like diamonds; some are as dull as a muddy ditch. But the mind of the man you name, child, will always be black through and through.'

'Not if he could forget the Past.'

‘No one can forget the Past. Least of all such a man as this. I will show you some day, in a more convenient place than this, that the Past can never be forgotten, or put aside. Your people here think they have forgotten it, when they have only dulled their senses to it. The Master thinks that he forgets the Past; yet every night he goes away in imagination to talk with his friends of the Past. You yourself do the same thing.’

‘Gilbert’—she avoided the point: she could not argue; but she could feel—‘you are always telling me that you will show me this or that. But all these things are Outside.’ She looked round her with a shudder: were they not already in the dreaded Outside—which lay all round that end of the Universe, the House of Meditation?

‘You are going Outside, Cicely,’ Gilbert told her firmly. ‘You are going with me—soon—some day—when your mother’s promise has been fulfilled.’

‘But I can never leave the House and the Master.’

‘There is an old Book on which, as on a foundation, this House is built. You have never read in this Book, Cicely, which is a great pity, because it is full of humanity. Well, it is said in that Book, as a common and well-known law of nature, that a man shall forsake his father and his mother and shall cleave to his wife. The same law rules the woman, who every day forsakes father and mother and clings to her husband. We shall together obey that universal law, Cicely, and cleave unto each other.’

‘There are laws—Outside—which do not belong to us. The laws of the land do not touch our Community.’

‘This is not the law of the land, Cicely. It is a law of nature—which makes me love you, dear child.’

‘Oh! Gilbert,’ her face flushed with pleasure. ‘It makes me so happy. And

I love you, too, as much as I love the Master—far more than any of the others.'

'Haven't they taught you to avoid Single Attachments?'

'We are not to think too much of one person. That is the Rule.'

'What is "too much"? I think of you, Cicely, all day and all night. Is that too much? Do you think of me?'

'Oh yes. But I think of the Master as well.'

'In that case you are quite safe. Certainly, I cannot think too much of you. In this dreary House, full of dreary people who delude themselves with a belief worthy only of the highest visionary like the Master, which is perfectly unfit for the boor, which can only be true with a soul as pure and innocent as your own—what is there to think about but you? Cicely, you are the one pleasant spot, the solitary flower, in this mass of stupid selfishness.'

‘No—no—Gilbert. You don’t know us. Oh! ask the Master to tell you what we are.’

‘The Master? He will tell me honestly what he believes the House to be. Never mind that, Cicely dear.’ He took her hand. ‘Something I have to tell you, dear child.’ He raised the hand and kissed it. She sat quite still, bathed in the glow and warmth of this young sun-god—her Apollo—who said that he obeyed her, but who commanded her in everything. ‘In a few days—six or seven at the outside—something will happen in this House—something decisive, something that will change all my future; I know not, yet, what it will be; yet, if the message is true and the promise be fulfilled, it will bring no harm to me. Sibyl, Delphian, Priestess of the Sacred Grove—what do you think of the coming event?’

She dropped her hands; her face turned white; she fell back and would have fallen,

but Gilbert supported her. Her eyes closed; she was in trance again.

The soul remained outside the body for two or three minutes only. She opened her eyes; she blushed to find herself lying on Gilbert's arm; she sat up. 'Gilbert!' she said, 'I have seen my mother and I have asked her what this means. "Tell him," she says, "that nothing will happen to his harm."' '

'How do you know, Cicely, that it was your mother?'

'Oh! Gilbert! As if one could be deceived in such a thing as that! Not to know my own mother?'

'Well, Cicely, I accept your assurance. I am very glad to accept it, because otherwise the next few days would be an anxious time. After they are over and done with, and we have found out what the message really means, that question will arise between us.'

‘What question, Gilbert?’

‘The question of the universal law. Whether a girl shall leave her father and her mother and shall cleave to the man who loves her.’

‘Oh, Gilbert! Go away? Leave the Master? Go into Outside, where there is nothing that we love—not even Meditation?’

‘You shall have Meditation, if you desire it.’

‘Oh! Gilbert; you must not go. Oh! you have made me so happy here!’ The tears welled up into her eyes. ‘What should I do without you? Oh, yes—I understand now. Before you came the place was dull and stupid. Every night I look forward to the morning when I shall talk to you again; and every morning I look forward to the long day when I shall talk to you again and listen to you. Oh! Gilbert—Gilbert—you must not go away and leave me.’

They were the words of love, in the voice of love, with the passion of love, and yet Cicely knew not the meaning of love; nor did she know that she loved the Master in one way and this man in another; nor did she know that a man could be to her more than a brother.

Gilbert took her hand again. He sat down beside her on the boulder; he laid his arm round her waist just as if he had been a young man courting his girl on Hampstead Heath on a Sunday evening in July—but Love is a mighty leveller. He drew her closer; he kissed her shapely head. ‘My dear—my dear,’ he said, ‘I must indeed leave the House; and yet I shall never—never leave you. For you will leave the spirits of your father and your mother and cleave to me; and we twain shall be but one soul—not two standing lonely in the universal space, but one.’ He kissed her again and again.

She offered no resistance. Perhaps it was gradually dawning upon her that here was a different kind of man—not a Brother at all.

So much were these two people occupied and carried away that they did not hear a footstep which approached; so much were they wrapped up in each other—which can only be understood by thinking of the common roll jam pudding—that they did not look round. This was perhaps fortunate; for they would have seen a red and angry face looking on from the angle where the cliff ran down to the stream and turned again—a very angry face; with burning cheeks, with flaming eyes, with trembling lips, and a figure trembling all over with the madness of rage and jealousy.

It was Sister Phœbe. She had followed, to watch and spy upon the guilty doings of the wicked pair.

She stepped forward, her foot unheard

upon the grass ; she laid her hand—a firm bony hand with a good muscular grip in it—upon Gilbert's shoulder.

He turned guiltily. He started to his feet.

'Single Attachments!' she said, with a hiss—there was a sibilant at the beginning and a sibilant at the end—and a menace in her voice.

Only one of the guilty pair blushed. It was the man. Cicely looked up without the least confusion, yet with a little terror, for the woman looked so fierce and so threatening. Besides, the Master did not approve of Single Attachments. But she was going to leave the Community ; she was going to leave father and mother and all and to cleave unto her lover. It mattered nothing, she understood now, having learned this wisdom in the last five minutes, whether Sister Phœbe approved or disapproved.

'Single Attachments!' Sister Phœbe repeated.

She brandished a long and bony forefinger in their faces—one so young ought not to have had a finger so bony—and she turned and disappeared. She would have spoken, but, as with Silas, the words proper for the occasion refused to come. Therefore she walked away.

‘She followed and listened and watched,’ said Gilbert. ‘Very good. It is what I should have expected of her. Never mind, Cicely : in a few days we shall depart to a place where Sister Phœbe can neither follow nor listen. Don’t be afraid, my dear—my dear—my dear!’

‘I am not afraid with you, Gilbert. But why did she look so angry?’

‘It is the jealousy of the slighted woman. Think no more about her. We will make ours a Double instead of a Single Attachment. That is not against the Master’s rule, is it?’

CHAPTER V.

AN EXPLANATION.

LOVE-MAKING on the edge of a precipice would be incongruous—but suppose one is perfectly certain that there is to be no falling over that precipice? Once assured even on such imperfect evidence as satisfied Gilbert, upon this point, why should we not make love? It is a healthy and a natural occupation. It had interested Gilbert first of all; then it began to interest him more; then it absorbed him, insomuch that he forgot for the time his purpose and the precipice: the end of his stay and—very possibly—the end of himself.

It is always so, to forget everything in the

contemplation of another soul ; and now, for one week at least, courtings and contemplation, love-making and dreams and tenderness all had to be put aside for the time. This chance meeting with Annandale brought back Gilbert from the land of dreams to reality—with the man in the foreground whom he had almost managed to forget. Only a week ; only six days ; only five. And something on each one of the days to keep him well in the front.

Only five days. It was the morning after the disgraceful experience of the Single Attachment beside the stream. The day began with the arrival of two letters for Gilbert. Never before had any member of the Community received a single letter. The Master received them, and hesitated before he passed them on.

‘ Brother Gilbert,’ he said reproachfully, ‘ when do you intend to sever yourself from Outside ?’

They were, both of them, letters of the greatest importance. The first was from Mr. Arthur Annandale, still staying at the hotel of Aldermanbury.

‘I told you,’ he wrote, ‘that Lady Osterley had arrived in New York. Naturally I have informed her about yourself—she always took an absurd interest in you—and I told her of your present religious or social convictions, and of your soul-elevating occupation. She telegraphs that she is coming here from New York to-morrow and that you must meet her. So you must come. If you are prevented by the exigencies of your new profession—such as bawling potatoes in the street with a pal and a donkey cart—and so cannot come, we will drive over and visit the place and see the monks and their monkery with the nuns and their nunnery. Do you know that you forgot the strawberry basket—left it in the porch of the hotel? It wasn’t wasted. Six little nigger boys found it, and

attempted to commit suicide with the contents. I saw them. By the way, you may perhaps be able to leave your cart and your pal outside the hotel.'

Dorabyn in Aldermanbury, within four miles of her husband! And within five days of that appointed by fate! Strange that she should be brought to this place at such a time!

He opened the second letter. This was more important still. It was from his private detective in New York, who had been employed in following up the man Charles Lee.

'I assume,' he wrote, 'that you desire to keep this man out of danger. Therefore I must warn you that there has happened a very serious development of his case. The whole business of the death of the young Mexican, about which I have already given you a hint, has now, I am informed, been unravelled by the police. The body of the

man was found under some shrubs in the street; his pockets were empty; he had been killed by a knife-thrust in the back. It was learned that he had been staying at a hotel; he left this hotel with another visitor, who came home at midnight without him. In the morning the other visitor went away. There was no suspicion of anything against him: he was allowed to go away. Then the body of the man was found, and it was buried after examination. This other visitor was Mr. Charles Lee; the place where he took the young Mexican was a gambling den. Now, two of the gang have been arrested in different towns, and without communication with each other have confessed the truth. I have not seen their confessions; but they agree in the main point: the pigeon was brought to the plucking by Mr. Charles Lee, and it was his knife in the end which killed the man as he was trying to get away with money he had won. If, therefore, Lee

is arrested on a charge of fraud, he will be immediately afterwards accused of wilful murder. Lee should therefore remain perfectly quiet where he is. A description of his appearance, station, etc., has by this time been sent out broadcast all over the country. If one of these papers falls into the hands of any one in your Community, the man will probably be denounced. If not, there is no other place of safety for him in the American continent. They have no photograph of him, which is one point in favour of his present safety and future escape. But the description of him is clear.'

The description was very clear ; a handbill was inclosed :—

'REWARD.—Five hundred dollars for the capture of Charles Lee, charged with conspiracy and fraud. The said Charles Lee, who has been known as Charles Hamilton, Charles Gordon, Charles Courtenay, and other *aliases*, is believed to be an Englishman. He is six feet one inch in height ; he

is about thirty-four years of age ; he has black hair and black eyes ; he wears no beard nor moustache ; his features are straight and regular ; his face is extremely pale ; he is grave and austere ; his manners are polite and cold. They are those of a refined gentleman.'

For the moment—what next ? He must certainly keep the man at home. Therefore there must be some explanation.

Generally, after dinner, Lee retreated to the shade of the trees beyond the lawn, where, with feet outstretched, he seemed to sleep away the afternoon. To-day, however, he was not in his usual place. Gilbert looked about for him : in the Hall ; in his bedroom ; in the veranda ; but found him at length alone in one of the empty workshops, where none of the members were ever found in the afternoon.

He was seated on a humble three-legged stool before a carpenter's bench ; it might

have been an armchair before a table in Downing Street. He had a pack of cards in his hand, and he was intent upon some kind of game—was it some problem in High Diplomacy?—he was as much interested as if it was that; or, was it some innocuous form of Patience? or was it some one of the many thousand varieties by which unhappy cards are forced to deceive the credulous?

One knows not. It is only certain that he had retired to this place in order to be quite alone.

He looked up when he heard the footsteps on the floor. His face showed neither annoyance, nor astonishment, nor embarrassment at the interruption; he preserved the same perfect calm and tranquillity; nothing was more astonishing to Gilbert than the contrast between this face, which was as a mask never to be lifted, and the face which this man's past ought to have worn. Every

mean and miserable and violent crime ought to have been stamped upon that face; yet behold! it was the face of a plenipotentiary—calm, judicial, quiet, fearless, immovable: the face say, rather, of an Oriental king who must be just and stern and pitiless to punish, and must also be generous and sorrowful and quick to reward. Such was the face of this man; so strong, so set, so encouraging to lovers of virtue.

He looked up, then, and stared with icy insolence, as one who is too proud to be disturbed by people of the baser sort, yet wants explanation.

‘I have come——’ Gilbert hesitated. The man’s calmness was a kind of insult, considering everything. Has a man who has dropped down, down, down into such depths of infamy, the right to assume any dignity at all? ‘I have come,’ he went on, ‘for a few words of explanation.’

‘Go on, sir.’ He swept the cards together

and held them in his left hand. They might have been a bundle of despatches.

He half turned round, leaning against the wall, with his long legs crossed. He was exactly like a State Minister about to give audience.

‘I must begin by telling you that I know pretty well the history of your two years’ residence in this country. Shall I remind you?’

‘As you please.’

‘You arrived in New York just two years ago. You came over under the name of Charles Lee. You travelled as a second-class passenger, and you remained in your cabin most of the time in order not to be recognised by any of the first-class passengers. You very soon found your way to some gambling hell, and there you lost the five hundred pounds which was all you had.’

The Court inclined its head, gravely.

‘As you had no more money, you were

turned into the street. You were presently picked up by one of the company who had cheated you. He gave you assistance and made a proposition to you.'

'A proposition,' murmured the Court.

'Very well: I have traced you from town to town. I know everything that you did, including the last business which caused the dispersal and flight of the gang.'

Another gentle condescension of the proud head.

'Some of your friends are already in gaol. The police are naturally anxious to include you in the number. So far, they have failed to find you. They have no suspicion of this place. You are perfectly safe here. They are looking for you in the places where such persons as yourself are generally found.'

'You are going to put them on the right scent?' There was a concentration of contempt in the question which made the innocent man writhe.

‘You will be arrested, if at all, not on a charge of felony, or fraud, but for the wilful murder of a certain young Mexican.’

The man dropped the cards out of his hand. They fell upon the table. He turned quickly and picked them up again. ‘Go on, sir.’

‘If I wished you to be arrested and tried, I should arrest you myself.’

‘What do you wish, then?’

‘I wish to see you dead, Sir Charles Osterley,’ he answered bluntly.

Sir Charles bowed gravely. ‘Yes, I have thought so for some time. Well, in my turn I will tell you something. I have myself been very strongly tempted, sir, ever since you came here, to put you out of the way. I knew, from the first, that you came here in search of me. I wish I had killed you. A dead enemy is better than a living one. Once or twice I have been very near it. It would have been quite easy to do it. I have gone

so far as to get up in the night and to take my knife — but, somehow, there's always something to interfere in this cursed place. Sometimes I think it is haunted : I couldn't find the door of my room ; I felt round and round the room, but I couldn't find it. Then there was another time : I walked up the stream in the shade of the woods, and I came upon you lying under a rock fast asleep. Then I could have done it. I should have done it, too, but that little devil of a girl, whom you are always sending to me with messages, trying to frighten me, ran out of somewhere and stood between. I couldn't very well kill her as well. So you escaped for that time.'

'Thank you,' said Gilbert. Cicely, then, had saved his life. It was something to remember.

'And when shall we proceed to the next—or final step?'

'I believe—on Saturday.'

‘On Saturday,’ he repeated. ‘Something will happen. Will that something—may I ask?—take the form of a—a personal encounter?’

‘Perhaps. Most probably. If you please.’

‘It will please me well. Nothing will please me better, When you are once out of the way I shall feel more tranquil. Mr. Maryon, I was once assisting at the adjustment of a quarrel such as ours. It was a pretty sight. They played a game—a single game—for a revolver—do you understand? Only one revolver. The revolver lay between them. It was a game worth playing. At the end of it, the winner——’

‘I understand. On Saturday you will bring a new pack of cards unopened. For my part, I will bring a revolver loaded. We may as well settle the quarrel that way as any other. But meanwhile you will engage not to precipitate matters, or to spoil the game, by going into town and getting arrested and hanged?’

‘And your friend the detective will not bring the sheriff here? Very good. Till Saturday, then——’ He inclined his head slightly: he was the Minister dismissing a deputation of one. ‘Good morning, Mr. Maryon; I am pleased to have had the opportunity of hearing your views.’

CHAPTER VI.

LADY OSTERLEY'S ARRIVAL.

THUS dismissed, Gilbert retired with some feeling of humiliation. He had advanced as one about to dictate terms ; he withdrew as one who had accepted terms.

However, there was something gained. The man would not appear in Aldermanbury, and it would be easy to keep Dorabyn from visiting the House.

Lady Osterley occupied a suite on the first floor. There is an admirable arrangement in the American hotels by which a travelling party can take a suite of rooms like a flat—bedrooms, sitting-rooms, bathrooms, all com-

plete, in a ring form, separated from the rest of the house. This is a much more convenient arrangement than the private room in the English hotel. At the same time the rooms—living and sleeping rooms—are far better furnished than in our best hotels. There are electric lights, electric fans, electric bells; there are most comfortable chairs and most useful tables; a lady may use her bedroom for other purposes besides sleep: she may write in it, read in it, receive her friends—at least her lady friends—in it. Lady Osterley had taken a suite with two sitting-rooms; in the first Gilbert found her nurse and her maid, with the boy, now nearly four years old, a bonny boy, playing about the floor; in the inner room Dorabyn herself sat at the open window, looking down upon the clicking electric cars and the shops with their revolving fans, and the stream of men with the eager, nervous faces—compared with them our City face is vacuous and bovine—yet we

do a good stroke of business year in year out ; and the women so extravagantly well dressed slowly going into the shops or coming out of them. She had already communicated a sense of herself to the room. The table and the chairs were littered with her things : her books, her sketching-blocks, her paint-box, her desk, her work. At the sight of these familiar objects, and of Dorabyn herself, there came back to Gilbert the memory of a certain dressing-room ; a confession of suffering and shame ; that solemn pledge, to redeem which he was now a member of the Community of Cranks.

Dorabyn sprang to her feet and welcomed him. ‘My dear Gilbert!’ she cried. ‘To find you here ! How long is it since I heard from you?’

She did not ask him how he had fared, and why he did not fulfil his promise. ‘I heard you were here,’ she went on with a smile—an unwonted smile—upon her sad

face. 'Therefore of course I came on at once. To be sure, it matters very little where I am so long as I am not at home.'

'You are looking well, Dorabyn. A little pale, but as stately as ever. When were you not stately, I wonder?'

She had preserved that quality, whatever else she had lost. She still moved and stood and spoke like a queen.

'I am tired of wandering, Gilbert. That is all I have to tell you. And I see no end to it. Things are exactly as they were, and I have no hope of any change.'

'Yet there may be change — at any moment.' Had she forgotten his promise? It seemed so. She made no allusion to it, neither then nor afterwards.

She shook her head.

'There can be no change but by death. I must not dare to hope for any man's death. Yet, surely in this case, it could not be more

awful or more terrible than his life. I pray for nothing now. I hope for nothing.'

'Yet there may be change at any moment. My poor Dorabyn, now I look closer, you have a harassed look.'

'Harassed? I am hunted. No deer in the forest could be more hunted than I am. They hunt me everywhere. They find me out wherever I go. They find me out and write to me. "Where is Charles? For Heaven's sake"—it is his mother or his sister—"where is Charles?" Then I run away again. As yet they do not know that I have crossed the ocean, but they will soon find out, and then the hunt will begin again. Find me, if you can, Gilbert, an uninhabited island.'

'Can you not invent something?'

'Oh, Gilbert: everything is so much more difficult than I thought it would be when I told you—have you forgotten? No: how could any one forget?—about—about that—

that shameful business. I knew there would be that kind of trouble. No one, Gilbert, if I can help it, shall ever learn the truth. You, my cousin, and myself, we three know, and nobody else. Even the respectable old solicitor does not know all. My son's fair name shall not be tarnished. The man has relations, you know: everybody has; but this man has got relations by multitudes; never was a man with so many cousins. He has a mother—poor soul! and a sister or two—his elder sister Alice died over here somewhere, I believe. Poor mother! Poor sisters! They shall never know if I can help it. They send letters to me—letters by the dozen, the score, the peck, the bushel. Oh! Gilbert, Gilbert, if you could only read those letters. They are angry, tearful, expostulatory, threatening, everything. “Where is he?” they ask: “what is he? How is he? What is the matter with him? Who is his doctor? What are the

prospects of recovery? Why—why—why will I not answer, or tell them even where he is?’”

‘Yes. It is only in novels that a man can act without a crowd of cousins knowing all that he does.’

‘You see, the man, to them, is still the splendidly successful young man; the young man of principle; the young man quite safe to become Prime Minister. They were so proud of him, poor things! His breakdown was the bitterest blow and disappointment to them. Oh! Gilbert, men don’t understand how their belongings glory in their ambitions, and how the cousins become distinguished through their distinction! I never understood this fully until the man broke down. Oh! the bitter blow—to his people; the cruel disappointment—to his cousins! Why, he was going to elevate the family, which had just a baronetcy in it, with never a man of any distinction, into an

illustrious house headed by a great statesman! Think of it! Think of becoming first cousin to a Palmerston or a Pitt! There is true distinction for you! And they missed it.'

'And do you never answer any letters?'

'None at all. It is the only safe rule. Nor will I ever see any of them if I can help it. Sometimes they have tried to get at me. I ward them off, put them off and run away.'

'Why not tell them something? That he was a gambler, ruined himself—had to go away?'

'No. There is disgrace in having to run away; and a kind of disgrace in being a gambler. At least, I suppose so. My boy shall never know his father's madness, nor his father's iniquity. No one shall ever, if I can help it, get a clue to the secret. He, above all, shall never entertain the least suspicion.'

'You must tell him something about his father.'

‘Yes. I have thought it out. I shall tell him what the world knows ; what his father’s family will tell him : that a breakdown of health sent him abroad ; that he died alone somewhere, in some place in Italy, or Spain, where there is no Protestant cemetery, so that he was buried without a tombstone in a garden or a field. That is what I mean to tell him, Gilbert.’

‘I see.’

Gilbert looked at her curiously. If she only knew that but two or three miles away the man himself was in hiding. But she should not know. And he looked for some sign in her manner, in her voice, in her face, that she remembered that promise of his. Dorabyn gave no sign. If she remembered his words at all, it was only to remember as well that no one could help except Death the Deliverer.

‘I am so tired, so tired of wandering,’ she went on. ‘And for the boy’s sake I must

some day soon settle down in some obscure place—some such place as this, where English people are not often seen. I will not, if I can help it, live under an assumed name. The boy will have to be educated. Oh, Gilbert! the situation is full of trouble and danger. As for the man, I have made inquiries. The respectable old gentleman, his solicitor, has heard nothing about him. He says so, and I believe him. He has quite disappeared. He may be dead. Sometimes I think that he must be dead, because—what could he do for a living? If he is not dead he must be passing under another name. How can I learn whether he is alive or dead? Why, he might even appear before me at any minute! Fortune brings about strange coincidences. I dreamed about him last night. I dreamed that he stood before me, cold and proud and austere as ever; giving no outward sign, though all his crimes were flaming and burning in his

heart. Nothing—no shame, no exposure even, could take the pride out of that man's face or make him betray the least emotion or bitterness or self-reproach.'

'Such coincidences do sometimes occur,' said Gilbert. 'But one need not think about them nor anticipate them.'

'Well, that is enough about myself. Now about you, Gilbert. What is it I hear about selling strawberries in the street? And what is this Community?'

Gilbert made up quite a pretty little story of this House of Industry and Trance. He said nothing about the rusticity of Brother Silas or the hardness of Sister Phœbe, nor did he discuss the attractions of Sister Cicely.

Lady Osterley listened with interest, but without enthusiasm. One sometimes reads about these communities, of which there have been so many in America, but to converse with a member is a privilege seldom

accorded to anyone. However, she was not carried away, although Gilbert spoke with animation of this beautiful House.

‘I gather,’ she said, ‘that your people are not gentlefolk, to begin with.’

‘They are not. I concede the point. There is no distinction of class among them.’

‘Nor is there among us. My dear Gilbert, real gentlefolk know no distinctions among themselves. If you want the society of persons who are not real gentlefolk, any part of London will provide it for you in plenty. They are the people who cultivate distinctions, not we. No need to cross the Atlantic. Then you talk about the perfect life. My dear boy, is there, in all the world, any imaginable life more perfect than that of the best society in England? There cannot be, I assure you. Which makes me regret all the more my enforced exile.’

‘It is not quite the same thing. You do not understand.’

‘It is only one of the ways of thinking about going to heaven. My dear Gilbert, it was never your weakness to change this life into a dream of going to heaven. It never was your custom to take up with fads and fancies. Why do you not go home, if you want a monastery, and build one there for gentlefolk, and lead the most perfect life you can? Perhaps I would come and live there too, if those people could be kept from worrying me with letters. Your present House, I am convinced, is full of dull men and women with no manners.’

‘About the women,’ said Gilbert. ‘Most of them, it is true, have, we will say, few manners, poor dears; yet they are for the most part dreamy and gentle; they are not obtrusive in their mannerlessness; they neither disgust nor repel one. I am on very friendly terms with several. I could, if you would allow me, Dorabyn, bring you one whom even you, I am sure——’

Dorabyn clapped her hands and laughed gently.

‘Oh! I knew it! I was sure of it! You to go hawking strawberries about the street! You to become a gardener and a costermonger! You to sit down every evening and to look on at a company of cranks going off into trance! Ridiculous!’

‘In fact,’ said Gilbert truthfully, ‘the company of cranks is not the sole object of my stay at the House.’

‘It is, on the other hand, . . . what is her name?’

‘They call her Cicely.’

‘Cicely what?’

‘I don’t know. I don’t want to know her by any other name. I am very seriously in love, Dorabyn. For a good many years your letters prevented me from falling in love. I wanted no meaner creature, you know.’

‘Gilbert!’

‘And now I have found—no meaner creature.’

‘What are her belongings—her people?’

‘I don’t know. She must be a gentlewoman by birth as she is by education. Her father, who died the other day, educated her. Of her mother’s part I do not at present speak, because she died in giving birth to Cicely. There are many strange things at the House, but Cicely’s case is the strangest. I do not know even her father’s name. But you shall see her. Prepare yourself for a hideous dress—it is the dress of the Sisters; prepare yourself for the sweetest face in the whole world; her cheek is too pale, her eyes are too serious, her lips seldom smile; it is because she lives too much in the other world. I shall teach her to live below. But I cannot talk about her, Dorabyn. I must bring her.’

‘Is it settled, Gilbert? Are you formally engaged?’

‘She understands nothing. She is a child in innocence and ignorance. She knows that she thinks about me all day long ; and she likes to be with me and is never tired of talking to me. All that she confesses. As for the rest—she knows nothing.’

‘Bring her to me, Gilbert. And—afterwards? When you are married there will be no more nonsense about the House of Trance, will there?’

‘I have ideas. I do not know, yet, what is best to be done. There are difficulties. But I think they may be overcome. I do not desire to stay longer than is necessary’—his face fell suddenly—‘I must wait to see what will happen.’

Dorabyn looked at him with wonder. Why did he become black all at once, like the sky before a sudden storm?

‘Why do you look so gloomy, Gilbert? Is there anything disagreeable behind?’

‘Do I look gloomy?’

‘You turned suddenly into gloom. Gilbert, what is it? I told you my trouble. Tell me yours.’

‘It is not trouble exactly. I will tell you—say—on Saturday. Something is going to happen on Saturday. I know not what. I am anxious.’

‘Does it concern yourself, or your mistress?’

‘It concerns both. It concerns everybody. That is enough, Dorabyn. Now for yourself again. Let us have dinner early. They call their seven-o’clock meal supper here. And then we will drive in the park in the cool of the evening, and see the fireflies in the shrubs and the stars in the sky. The American stars are splendid. And the quiet of the place will calm your nerves—and mine as well.’

They dined together—these two and Annandale. The talk was the old familiar talk which one only gets with the old familiar

people. The House was forgotten, and all three were back in London.

After dinner they drove out to the park, which is a very lovely park, with ornamental water and valleys and cascades and hanging woods ; there was a little moon, but not much, and the skies were brilliant, and the fireflies illuminated the shrubs with myriads of tiny electric sparks. But they noticed nothing, for two had been out of London for two years and one for eighteen months, and they all three thirsted for the old talk.

‘Gilbert,’ said Dorabyn, when they alighted at the hotel, ‘you have been talking quite in the old way. You forget the Community very easily. If you were never to go back there any more——’

‘I forget everything with you, Dorabyn—except one thing, and that is always with me, day and night, wherever I go.’

He meant Cicely, not the unspeakable Man.

In the evening, when he climbed the stairs at about eleven, he heard the Man moving about the room. What was he doing? At least he was keeping his promise not to venture into Aldermanbury even at night.

CHAPTER VII.

PROPOS D'AMOUR.

‘CICLEY’—it was in the early morning before breakfast, the morning after the talk with Dorabyn, and they stood among the flowers—‘I want to talk very seriously to you.’

‘I like you best when you talk seriously, Gilbert, though it is very pleasant to listen while you talk about men and women as if you meant something else.’

‘You must talk seriously too, my dear Cicely—very seriously.’ He took her hand and held it lightly. To take a girl’s hand and to press it softly but firmly is accepted all the world over as an assurance of love.

Everybody knows so much of the language of love. But when you keep hold of her fingers lightly without pressure, it is a token, or a reminder, of ownership : of chains and bonds. I believe every girl understands this symbol ; and most girls prefer it to the former.

‘I want to talk seriously, then, about ourselves, my dear. First of all, you know that I love you, Cicely.’

‘Oh ! yes.’ Three weeks before she would have replied with a childish look of innocence in her eyes. Of course she loved him. Now, she had advanced so far under his tuition that she blushed when she made this confession.

‘Then, dear, we must understand what love demands, in our own case. You know that when two people like ourselves love each other—I mean two people like you and me, not two people like the Master and you, who also love each other—they want to marry : that is to say, to be together

constantly as your father and mother are together—perhaps, like those to whom is granted the perfect love, to be together and never tire of each other, not only in this world, but also in worlds to come. I speak, my dear, as you believe.'

'Those who love each other, Gilbert, never cease to love—oh! never—never—never.'

'Wisest and sweetest! never—never—never.' He kissed her white forehead.

'Now, my dear, what I want to say, very seriously indeed, is this. If that message of your mother's proves true——'

'It must prove true. My mother could not—oh! she could not—at her levels it would be impossible—she could not send a message if it was not true. You may depend perfectly—perfectly—Gilbert, on what she said.'

'Then, my sweet mistress, on and after Saturday next I shall be free to leave the House.'

‘Leave the House? Oh! Gilbert!’

‘Yes. Leave the House, my dear. But don’t look dismayed. Don’t think I shall leave it without you. I am going to take you away with me. I am going to take you with me right away into that mysterious abyss which you call Outside.’

She shuddered. ‘Will my mother let me go?’

Gilbert received the question quite gravely, and answered as if her mother were still living. ‘Cicely dear, your mother has had every opportunity, for a month past, of observing that I have been diligently endeavouring to steal away her daughter’s heart. If she had objected, she would have interfered and stopped it, somehow, long before this. But she has not. On the contrary, she has sent me messages, through you, and through the Master as well. She has shown an interest in me from the beginning. I think, my dear, that since she has herself been

perfectly happy in her love, she desires you, too, to possess and to impart that blessing. Sure I am that there can be no greater happiness for me, my dear, than your love.'

'I think she loves you, too, Gilbert. But to leave the House—and the Master—and the brothers and sisters?'

'You will leave it with me, not alone, my dear. I know Outside pretty well. I can promise that you will very soon find life there infinitely more attractive than life here. There is so much to do and to observe. At first you will find everything new and strange. And you will also find, among the people you will know, most things with the prettiest possible covering, lid, casing, dress, or external wrapper, so that at first you will be quite delighted with all that you see. Afterwards you will naturally cease to be quite so much pleased with things. You will find, here and there, I am afraid, pretence and assurance.'

‘But in Outside they cannot meditate. The Master says that there is no Meditation anywhere in the world except in this place.’

‘You shall go to your mother for direction. As for your Meditation, I confess I doubt its value even in the life that the Master desires. However, I should think that to go into your own room and to lock the door would be quite easy anywhere in the world. It is true, however, that people Outside do not as a rule meditate—as Sister Euphemia says—worth a cent.’

‘Without Meditation how can one rise?’

‘You ask more than I can tell you. Cicely, my child, I am one of the world: I have always lived in the world. I have hitherto cared no more about what you call Elevation than the rest of the world. But I should say from observation, that methods of Elevation, that is, of attaining to a higher level of the mind and the soul, should be as easily learned in the world as here.’

‘How should I learn them?’

He shifted the responsibility once more.

‘Again, if you still, after some experience of the world, desire them, ask your mother.’

She was silent. To leave the House! It frightened her. To go into the raging, roaring, noisy Outside, of which they spoke with a kind of terror! The thought made her shiver. But that Gilbert should go away without her! That would be worse.

‘I shall take you with me, my dear,’ he went on, reading her thoughts, ‘this very day to a friend, an old friend of mine, who is staying at a hotel at Aldermanbury. She will tell you that it is not so very dreadful a thing to live in the world. I do not think she ever meditates, but it would be difficult to find a woman of a nobler nature than this friend of mine. She has promised to interest herself in you. We will go over in the afternoon—to-day—we

can easily go there and get back in time for your Meditation.'

Man proposes—but the event is not always exactly what he designs. You shall see what happened as regards this proposed visit to Dorabyn.

'And now let us sit down, my dear, and talk about the world.'

They sat down on the bench occupied by Brother Charles in the hours of Recreation ; it was close to the flower-bed which marked the grave of Sister Alice. Gilbert laid his hand on the girl's waist and began to talk.

'I mean to take you away with me when this business of mine is over,' Gilbert went on. 'I have arranged it all in my own mind. Dorabyn—my old friend—will receive you, I am sure. I shall take you to England, where I have a house. It is not a large house, my child, because I am not what they call a very rich man : but it is a pretty house and an old house. Part of it was built in the

reign of Henry the Eighth : there are ghosts in it and secret chambers : there are gardens round it, and a Park and the ruins of an old Abbey : outside the Park there is a village church and a churchyard full of solemn trees. Swallows fly about the churchyard ; rooks caw in the branches : it is one of the oldest and most venerable churches in the country : there are cottages with thatched roofs and green palings : there are cottage folk, soft-mannered, respectful—you will love them, Cicely : not far off there are other houses, where you will find certain gentlewomen who will welcome you for my sake first, and your own next ; they are soft of voice and of manners : they are kind and gracious : you will love them and they will love you. My dear, I promise that you shall find the place full of love—far, far more full of love, believe me, than you will ever find here. Such love as you desire—which is your very breath—you can only find among gentlefolk.'

‘Gilbert, why do you think so much of gentelfolk? Here we have no such thing.’

‘Apart from the Master, who has been made a gentleman by your mother, and you, dear child, we have not, indeed.’

‘But how will these kind ladies receive one who is not one of themselves—a gentlewoman, as you call it?’

‘You are one of themselves, my dear. They will never entertain the slightest doubt upon that subject. Your face, your manner, your voice—everything proclaims that fact aloud.’

She sighed. ‘I am afraid,’ she said. ‘I am sure that I do not know their manners or their speech. Gilbert, it terrifies me more than I can tell you to think of going among all these strangers.’

‘You will learn all there is to learn very soon. And you need not be frightened in the least. In this village, among these quiet, kindly folk, you will learn certain little dif-

ferences in a very short time. My dear, our farms and gardens are far more beautiful than these. You will find among these people a far more beautiful life than this of the Community. Here you have no village church and no churchyard : no beautiful service of rich and poor, old and young, all together : no refined and gracious ladies. You will grow, my dear : you will put on new ideas, just as you will put on dresses far more beautiful than this.'

'Oh, Gilbert! you make my heart beat. But I am afraid.'

'You will change through and through : you will learn that you belong to the past in a way you have never before understood ; that you do not stand alone in the universe, that you are one of an infinite multitude——' He stopped, for she was no longer listening. Her eyes were again far away. Her face was white, her breathing was suspended. He was not in the least alarmed or anxious.

She was again in a trance or catalepsy. He laid his arm about her waist to keep her from falling, and sat patiently waiting her return.

He waited ten minutes : then her lips parted : her colour returned : she opened her eyes. ‘Gilbert,’ she said, ‘you were talking about things which I could not understand—about villages and churchyards. Do not tell me too much. Let me learn everything gradually. I get frightened when you talk about what is coming. And then my mother called me. She is always watching over me, you know.’

‘Yes, I know. That is—but what did she say?’

‘She kissed me, and told me to follow my heart, and be happy.’

‘And that, dear Cicely?’

She moved towards him, and lo! it was heart to heart and lip to lip.

CHAPTER VIII.

CRITICISM.

THE Committee of the Community sat in deliberation in the Common Hall, which was at once refectory, chapter-house, calefactory, chapel, and place of Meditation.

The Committee did not meet to consider the affairs of the Community. These were all in the Master's hands ; he kept complete control of the business side of the Society ; nobody knew, nobody asked, what was its income and what were its resources ; sufficient for the members to know that the three square meals suffered no diminution in quantity. Who would confuse the finer parts of the brain, those which go to Meditation,

in order to study finance? Fortunately, as is generally the case with a successful founder, the Master was as good in administration as in Meditation.

Nor did the Committee meet for the passing of new laws or the alteration of old ones. There were no laws except the simple routine of Fatigue and Repose, Restoration and Meditation; every day was like its predecessor, save for the change of season; summer followed spring, autumn followed summer, winter followed autumn. There was no first day or Sunday, no seventh day or Sabbath, no saint's day, holy day, commemoration day, or anything but the same day with the same routine. Nothing, in fact, to disturb the mind or to hinder Meditation.

The Committee, whenever it was called together, which was a very rare event, met to deliberate on the conduct of a member, and especially on that part of his conduct

which might affect the others. The deliberations were carried on in the presence of the member concerned, who was thus 'criticised' to his face. He was invited to attend and to stand at the end of a long table, while a frank and completely outspoken criticism of his behaviour, his discourse, and the general conduct of his own life was carried on before him. This criticism of a member was an ideal arrangement made by the Master at the outset. You shall see, immediately, how well it worked. The leading thought in the establishment of the institution was that, in a spirit of love and faithfulness, a brother might be openly admonished of his faults, and so gently and lovingly led back to the better way. Like other ideal institutions, it was not always carried out quite in the spirit intended. Indeed, for some reason or other, the one thing which the members most feared was criticism. It is strange, for, if you think of

it, how beautifully we should all behave if we were faithfully admonished of our faults! The members, indeed, lived in daily terror of being criticised. Perhaps the critics were too faithful. In other departments of human activity the too faithful critic is not popular. Again, if you think of it, the man who aims at such a tremendous achievement as the Higher Life—the life of the next world, or even the next after that—ought surely to welcome a frank, outspoken, plain, unvarnished account of how his conduct appears to his brother members. Nothing should be more helpful. Yet, for some reason, nothing was more dreaded by the members. The sisters went to be criticised with trembling limbs, and returned with cheeks aflame. The brothers obeyed the summons with temper, and sometimes came away in a rage so blind that they had actually been known to leave the Community. Yet, surely, the Master was right. One cannot imagine a

more effective weapon in the cause of righteousness than the candid criticism of one's own loving brothers and gentle sisters. Perhaps, if the subject of discussion were allowed to take chloroform or ether or some other anæsthetic, the institution would be more popular.

The Committee of the Community was a body of twelve, the Founder being President. They filled up death vacancies by themselves ; the Community had no vote in the election. Since the only function of the Committee was to criticise, it will be understood that they were great sticklers for the Rule. Fortunately it was a simple Rule, because the Committee were like the Pharisees for dividing the word. The body consisted of women as well as of men ; they all belonged to the same class, that of the imperfectly educated ; and they all entertained the same narrow religion, tempered by the revelations expected by him who Meditates.

‘I suppose,’ said the Master, with a sigh, ‘that, as we have criticism to pronounce upon Brother Gilbert and Sister Cicely, we must have them both before us.’

‘Both,’ replied the Committee unanimously.

‘But separately ; not together,’ said Sister Phœbe, who was on the Committee.

‘I confess,’ said the Master, ‘that in the case of our young Sister Cicely, I would rather that she were placed in the hands of an elder member—say myself—for private criticism. She is young, she is inexperienced——’

‘She must be made to understand,’ interrupted Sister Phœbe quickly. ‘She cannot understand too early.’

The Master sighed again. He would have saved the child if he could. ‘Call Sister Cicely, then,’ he ordered. ‘Let us criticise the child in all tenderness. Remember, she is young ; she is used to

nothing but kindness ; she is a daughter of the House ; and her father was my first follower.'

'In tenderness,' said Sister Phœbe firmly. 'But in truth, always in truth, which is in love. Cicely's soul must be our consideration, until she makes it her own.'

The Committee murmured assent. Zeal for other people's souls was always a marked feature in the Committee. The Master looked round the table. He sighed ; the words were his own words ; he would have saved the child ; but he said no more.

Of course one associates the criticising of Gilbert and Cicely with that evidence of the Single Attachment discovered by Sister Phœbe. It was only the last drop that caused the cup of toleration to overflow. For a whole month it was evident to the Community that these two openly and shamelessly sought each other, walked together, and talked together. What did they talk

about? Subjects connected with Meditation and the Things Unutterable which nobody could remember? The Community feared not.

In fact, the daily conversation had drifted more and more away from the Community and into the wicked world, of which Cicely had now learned far more than she had ever imagined, insomuch that, like Eve, she was growing curious and wanted to learn a great deal more. So they talked while they worked in the garden, and they talked at meals, despite the presence of the Man of Marble, and they talked at Recreation, and the Community looked on and marvelled; and some were indignant, and some were jealous.

Cicely was in the garden tying up and weeding, as usual. She was quite happy; she was singing over her work—a song without words, a blithe song like the song of the lark, which she had never heard; yet

not a loud song, lest some of the brethren might be disturbed ; and while she sang she kept thinking about Gilbert—she thought about him all day long—and about what she could do for him to assist his spiritual advance, which was deplorably slow. Not once had he succeeded in getting into Meditation. And she had before her that vision of Outside.

Then there came to her one of the brothers.

‘Sister,’ he said, ‘the Committee are in meeting. They have to speak to you. Come with me.’

She turned pale and her heart became as heavy as lead. She knew—who did not?—the trials of a Criticism : not that she had yet passed through the ordeal, but others had, and talked. Members had been known to run away rather than face a Criticism. Besides, what were they going to talk about ? The Single Attachment ? She blushed a

rosy red, and again she turned pale. 'Come,' said the brother. Her colour came and went. She stood still, staring. 'Come,' said the brother.

She entered the Hall, bare-headed, carrying her hat. She stood at the end of the long table at which the Committee were assembled. She knew too well—this guilty criminal—that the criticism would turn upon Single Attachments. So that her cheek flamed and her lips quivered. The ceremony was exactly as if a penitent should kneel in silence before a company of priests who should, turn and turn about, recite and confess openly all that sinner's sinful deeds and all her sinful thoughts. It was as if the Father Confessor should confess in the name of the penitent.

'Sister Cicely,' the Master began, and paused.

Cicely lifted her head and looked round the table. There were but two faces which

showed any sign of kindness or of sympathy. One was the face of the venerable Master. His patriarchal appearance conveyed an assurance of kindness ; his long white hair, his benevolent face, his soft and gentle voice, soothed the fears of the girl. The other face was that of the little lady whose past Gilbert had restored to her. The rest might have been members of the Grand Inquisition, so hard and pitiless and determined were they.

‘ Sister Cicely,’ the President repeated ; ‘ from time to time it is the godly custom of this House for the Committee, which is the body of Presbyters, I myself being the Overseer, President, Bishop, or Master, to call before them any of the brothers who may be exposed to special temptation, who may be falling into danger, who may be neglecting the one important object of human life ; and, in a spirit of love, to point out their faults or dangers, and to lead that brother or sister back into the way of the Sinless Life. You

are, very specially, Sister Cicely, a daughter of the House : you were born among us, you have never been outside the House ; so far as it is permitted to love one more than another you are very dear to me ; your father was my earliest friend, he and I were the first members of this Community, which has since been abundantly blessed---yea, blessings fall thickly on our heads. Therefore, sister, we are, if one may say so, more than commonly concerned for the state of your soul. You have never known any of the temptations of the outer world ; you should indeed be already well advanced, considering your advantages, in the Way of Perfection. Yet I hear, sorrowfully, of dangers. Remember, child, that he who does not advance, recedes. We must still press onward. Receive, therefore, dear sister, the admonition of your brethren and your sisters in the spirit of submissive love and Christian meekness.'

'I have observed for some time,' said an

old man, with a harsh and grating voice, 'too much attention to the decoration of her person in our sister. She must be continually washing her hands and brushing her hair and keeping her dress clean. What matters a little dirt if the soul is right?'

'I have observed,' said another grimly, after a pause, 'that Sister Cicely is too fond of singing. She constantly sings at her work when she ought to be meditating.'

'I have observed,' said a third, after another pause, 'that of late she frequently laughs in her conversation. There should be nothing in the Community to laugh at.'

Cicely, her hands folded, made no reply whatever.

'She seems,' said an old woman critically, 'not to care any longer for the things of the Community—our blessings of the Common Life. She is languid in her intercourse with the members.'

'She chooses and selects her companions,'

said another woman, 'as if one were better or more desirable than another in the Community.'

'You hear, Sister Cicely,' said the President, looking nervously at Sister Phœbe. 'Perhaps we have said enough. Remember that there must be no selection or comparison among us. We are all brothers and sisters, with the same hopes and the same dangers. No selections, sister.'

'There is more than selection,' said Sister Phœbe, who had hitherto only nodded her head. 'I have myself observed, for some time, the growth of a Single Attachment—an attachment towards the English brother, Gilbert. I have watched you, Sister Cicely, with this brother, who is less to be blamed than you, because he has not yet acquired the spirit of our Rule—a spirit which forbids earthly love even in those who marry by command and permission of the House. You know this prohibition; it is our most dis-

tinctive teaching that we are not to imperil our souls by the selfish passion of love.'

'You know this teaching, Cicely,' said the Master.

Cicely made no reply.

Sister Phœbe went on, acquiring fresh vigour as she proceeded. 'You have singled out this brother. You walk with him, you meet him every afternoon in the garden, you sit beside him and talk. I have listened to your talk : it is about books—worldly books ; poetry—what has worldly poetry to do for the soul except to drag it down ? And about Outside you listen with guilty pleasure ; nay, I know not what he has told you, this brother who was once a rich young Englishman—that is, a profligate, whose life cannot be described by virtuous lips.'

She paused. Cicely made no reply, but the flush on her face continued.

Sister Phœbe went on.

'You whisper together ; you take no

pleasure in the society of the others ; you no longer converse with the sisters ; you stop in your work to think about him.'

Still Cicely made no answer.

'There is worse to follow.' Sister Phœbe looked round the room so as to collect and concentrate all thoughts on this one fact. 'Much worse. I have seen him kiss her! I have seen him kiss—her—head!'

The Committee murmured and shook their assembled heads, all but the little lady, who blushed and smiled.

'For my own part, I have not witnessed any kissing,' said the ancient brother with the harsh voice, 'but I have observed other signs of this Single Attachment. When such an attachment is formed there can be no longer any Meditation. This couple would separate themselves from us ; they would like to live apart. Our ways and manners have ceased to be good enough for them.'

'She follows him about with her eyes,'

Sister Phœbe continued. 'She draws him on. She is much worse than the other.'

'And he leans over her as if he wanted to put his arms round her,' added another member.

'It is her artfulness,' said Sister Phœbe. 'If she did not encourage him——'

'Enough,' interrupted the Master. 'Have you anything to say, Sister Cicely?'

'It is quite true'—Cicely drew herself up and faced her critics boldly—'that I take great pleasure in the conversation of Brother Gilbert.'

'Why!' cried Sister Phœbe, who was by far the most venomous of them all: 'she confesses it! She actually glories in her guilt!'

'There is no guilt,' Cicely replied quickly, 'in listening to the words of a well instructed man who fills one with new ideas. He has taught me things that I could never learn anywhere else. Ignorance is not spiritual elevation. I know so much.'

‘Knowledge of evil,’ said the Master, ‘is always dangerous. You have been brought up in ignorance of evil, sister. I hoped that you would always continue in ignorance. Knowledge of the world is knowledge of evil, and evil easily assumes the guise of good. Talk to him no more, my child, of Outside, or of anything beyond the daily life of the Community. But you are accused not so much of conversation with him—he shall be admonished on that point—as of forming a Single Attachment to him. Tell me if that is true.’

The girl hesitated. But the truth had to be told.

‘It is true,’ she said.

The Committee groaned. It was a hollow, melancholy groan.

‘Such an Attachment, dear sister,’ the Master continued, but very gently, ‘is dangerous in the extreme both to the Community and to yourself. It must be broken

down, trodden under foot, resolutely put away out of your mind as an unclean thing. It is both selfish and sinful—though a selfish soul can never be free from sin. It is selfish because it draws away your thoughts from others and concentrates them upon yourself and upon him ; so that, after the way of the world, there is nothing to be thought of in the whole world, by you and by him, but yourselves. Where are your sacred thoughts and holy meditations ? Dispelled ; driven away by this blind and unholy passion. Where is the way of perfection ? It is lost. And it is a sinful passion because it causes you to neglect your duties towards the Community. Why do we live together ? In order that we may work each for the other. Why do we work each for the other ? Because we would cause every one to walk in the way without cares and anxieties of this world : because we will not allow any thoughts or hope of personal gain or profit

to interfere with our meditations. You break in upon this rule ; you substitute thought and work for one—in place of thought and work for the Community.'

Then Cicely spoke—and she spoke with passion, and rebelliously.

'Since I have conversed with Brother Gilbert my thoughts have been on a higher level than they ever reached before. I have cast away my old selfishness. I have prayed for him, instead of myself, night and day. I am far holier of heart since I ceased to think about my own soul and have begun to think of his. It is better to think for another than for yourself. I shall continue to think for him.'

Sister Phœbe shrieked. 'This is rebellion,' she said. 'Shall we suffer a rebel to remain with us?'

The Master held up his hand. 'Listen, child,' he said. 'We cannot suffer you, our dear one, the daughter of my friend, to

become a castaway. We might expel you from the Community, but that would be your destruction and our great pain and grief. We will save you, dear child, from yourself—even against your own will we will save you, by the wholesome order and discipline of the House. We shall break up this Attachment for you ; we shall substitute another of a less destructive kind. Unhappy girl ! Your meditations are no longer for yourself, but for another. What will it profit you if his soul be saved while yours is lost ? For we are alone—each of us is alone in the world. We may support each other a little, and help each other a little. But each of us is alone. You must renounce, dear child, this Single Attachment.’

Cicely shook her head.

‘ There is but one certain way to break it up. For the sake of your highest interests, we have resolved on adopting that way. We shall give you to another man in marriage.’

To another man! Cicely caught hold of the table. Things became dim: she was like one who has received a violent blow. She staggered and reeled.

‘Give her a minute,’ cried the little old lady whose past was so hard to forget. She jumped up and ran to hold her. ‘Don’t frighten the child. Goodness! This comes of a committee with no knowledge. What do you know’—she addressed the Master—‘about a young girl’s heart? Courage, my pretty! perhaps it won’t be so bad, after all. Not one among you all, except me, who knows what is meant by love. Another man! Oh! dear Lord! another man!’

Cicely recovered. She stood upright again, though the sympathetic sister held her by the waist.

‘We are too sudden for you, dear child,’ said the Master kindly. ‘Believe me, it is for your good—your highest good. We shall give you in marriage to Brother Silas

here, who is willing, for his own Elevation, to take a wife.'

Brother Silas, to show his willingness in the matter of self-sacrifice, grinned from ear to ear. Cicely looked at him stupidly : she did not understand—except that she was to be separated from Gilbert.

'And now, dear sister,' said the Master, 'you have heard as much as is good for you. We want no more criticism, which may become a mischievous carping, unless restrained.' He looked at Sister Phœbe. 'Go now, and reflect on the selfishness and the dangers of the Single Attachment.'

'Not back to the garden,' cried Sister Phœbe. 'She will only meet the man there and make things worse.'

'I think, dear child,' the Master added, 'that we can excuse you from work for a day or two while——'

'In her own room,' cried Sister Phœbe.

'In the seclusion of your own chamber

while you consider alone the things that have been said to you this day.'

Cicely obeyed. She walked with hanging head and flaming cheeks and flashing eyes to the door of the women's wing, and disappeared.

They were very wrong. They should have married her there and then, before she knew what resistance meant. They let her go. At least those flaming cheeks and flashing eyes betokened a stormy honeymoon for Brother Silas. They let her go. The consequences to the bridegroom elect, as you will hear immediately, were disastrous indeed.

CHAPTER IX.

REVOLT.

‘CALL Brother Gilbert,’ said the Master.

‘And what may the Committee want with me?’ asked Gilbert.

‘You’ve got to come,’ replied the Summoner.

‘They’re going to criticise you,’ said one of his fellow-gardeners, with the ready smile of pleasing anticipation with which one greets a person about to suffer. All those who have been publicly flogged, tortured, beheaded, or hanged will remember the universal smile which greeted the patient on

his appearance. 'They will criticise you,' he said, 'for the good of your Elevation.'

'They will tell you your faults,' said another.

'Things you never suspected,' said a third. 'Ah!' with a long-drawn breath: only to think of the rage which would presently fill the soul of the sufferer!

Gilbert rolled down his sleeves—ask not what was his occupation—put on his coat and obeyed the summons.

The other men looked after him.

'Not before 'twas time,' said the first gardener. 'Light conversation,' said the second. 'He laughs,' said the third. 'He talks,' said the first—there were three only. 'With Sister Cicely,' said the second. 'They should both be watched,' said the third. And so on, because criticism is the universal solvent; it loosens all tongues and stimulates the dullest imagination; even criticism of this kind, which is perilously nigh to scandal.

The Master opened the proceedings with much the same kind of general introduction as he had used for the offending sister. Gilbert stood at the end of the table listening with outward respect.

‘Therefore,’ the Master concluded, ‘you will learn from what is said the judgment that is passed upon you by your brethren of this household and their opinion of your conduct. Remember that even if the judgment seems harsh it has been formed and will be uttered in the spirit of love.’

Gilbert bowed. ‘In the spirit of love,’ he repeated. Then he looked about him, found a chair, and sat down in easy attitude to receive what would be offered. There was no heightened colour or any appearance of terror or uneasiness whatever.

‘It is customary,’ said one of them timidly, ‘to stand in the presence of the Committee.’

‘I prefer to sit,’ said Gilbert. ‘The spirit of the Community is equality. Therefore, in a spirit of love, I take a chair.’

They looked at the Master, who passed over the incident.

‘I have observed,’ said the elderly brother with the rasping voice, opening the ball, ‘that Brother Gilbert gives himself airs. He looks as if he were superior to us.’

Gilbert bowed. ‘Thank you,’ he said. ‘Next!’

‘I have observed,’ said another, ‘that he is dainty about his food; he has also been heard to find fault with the way in which some members take their food, as if the Higher Life could be troubled about holding the knife and fork. And he has frequently complained that the steaks were tough.’

‘Excuse me for interrupting,’ said Gilbert. ‘Do I understand that the Higher Life requires toughness in the steak?’

The critic grew red and rather angry.

‘The question is flippant,’ he said. ‘The point of my observation is the daintiness of Brother Gilbert.’

Gilbert bowed again. 'Thank you,' he said.

'I have observed,' said a third, 'that Brother Gilbert has refused the coffee on the ground that it was mud.'

'Black mud,' Gilbert corrected him. 'It is quite true. Coffee ought not to be black mud.'

'And I,' said a fourth, 'have seen him turn up his nose because the sausages were fat.'

'These observations,' said Gilbert, 'are, I submit to this collective wisdom, wide of the mark. None of these things affect the spiritual condition as to which you are so tender. A man who is accustomed to food properly dressed is hindered by being invited to eat such things as are too often placed upon your table. If you have nothing of any greater importance than this I shall retire, and continue to state the fact when the coffee is black mud.'

He rose and looked round the table. Seeing another member about to speak, he sat down again.

‘I have also observed,’ said that other member, ‘that our brother is a respecter of persons.’

‘Which means, I suppose,’ Gilbert replied, ‘that I do not like the society of certain somewhat coarse members of the Community. Do you wish that they should drag all down to their own level?’

‘I have observed,’ said another, ‘hardness of heart. He does not keep himself open to the influences which we offer him. He has never been observed to meditate.’

‘I have remarked,’ said another, ‘that in his discourse he is proud and particular, and that he uses words and sayings which some of us do not understand. This confuses us. And sometimes he speaks as a mocker, meaning the opposite to what he says.’

Then there was silence for a space. Gil-

bert looked round coldly. 'Anything more?' he asked.

Sister Phœbe here broke in. 'Oh! there is a great deal more—a great deal more: these things are but a beginning; there is a great deal more. I have observed that Brother Gilbert has for some time fallen into a Single Attachment.'

Gilbert smiled. 'Oh!' he said, 'you have observed that, have you? I thought we should come to it, after these preliminaries. Very well. I understand, Master, that I have given offence to some by making remarks when the food was coarse and unfit to be placed upon the table. Will you inform me if there is anything contrary to the spirit of the Community in this kind of complaint? If so, I will in future refrain.'

'All depends upon the spirit and the manner. If in your remarks you did not intend any reflection upon the members——'

'Of course not. Why should I reflect

upon them? If they like black mud they may. Then it appears that I do not talk quite in the way customary to the members. The manner of talk will change insensibly, no doubt. And some members think that I give myself airs. Now, I would advise any such member to remember your own teaching and to confine his thoughts to his own solitary, individual soul. Then he will cease to notice my airs. So much for the preliminaries. Now, if you please, Master, we will take the next point of this meeting.' He addressed the Master, but he looked at Phœbe, who took the cudgels vigorously.

'He occupies himself all day long with Sister Cicely. He sits next her at meals; he works with her in the garden; he talks with her all Recreation; he laughs with her and makes her laugh even at Restoration; and I saw him, yesterday, as I have told you already, kiss her head.'

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The stars indicate the Master's harangue which followed. With a few alterations, *mutatis mutandis*, it was exactly the same as that which had been delivered for the benefit of the other sinner.

‘Therefore,’ the Master concluded, ‘for the sake of our highest interests we must exclude from the Community all these Single Attachments, with the uncontrolled passions, wild wraths, and fierce jealousies which disturb and drag down the souls of Outside. We have taken such measures as will effectually remove the object of your misplaced affection and place it altogether beyond your reach.’

‘What have you done with that child?’ Gilbert sprang to his feet and glared about the room.

‘We are going to marry her.’

‘To marry her? Marry her? Think what you are doing. There is not one in this Community who is fit to marry her—no

one who can stand beside her even in the gifts you desire. If you give her to one of your rustics and boors, you will destroy her.'

'We have considered,' said the Master coldly, 'what will be best for her welfare. And we shall marry her. In the Community we allow marriages, provided they are not accompanied and made hurtful by the presence of Love. A calm, meditative union, which, although each stands consciously apart from the other, and alone in the universe, may be helpful. Therefore we are going to marry Sister Cicely to Brother Silas here.'

'Silas?' Gilbert looked down upon the bridegroom elect with withering disgust. 'You would marry that girl—Cicely—to this clumsy boor?' Silas stood up and opened his mouth to speak, but could find no words, and sat down again, confused and angry. 'Do you know — can you imagine — what

that means? Good God! Are you human creatures?’

‘I said he was a respecter of persons,’ observed the member of the Committee who had made that original discovery.

‘Master,’ repeated Gilbert, ‘you cannot possibly mean to give this delicate, high-strung creature, your own child—almost your own daughter—to that boor? It is degradation. It is more. You—you who love her—can you mean it?’

‘We have considered the matter,’ the Master replied, with a certain sadness. ‘There is no passion of single love in the case. We are destroying that passion out of the love we all bear to her. You do not understand—you are still full of the prejudices of Outside.’

‘It is you who do not understand. Marriage for such a girl as Cicely, without love, would be degradation certain and fatal.’

‘Enough about Cicely,’ said the Master,

‘The whole spirit of the Community is concerned with this marriage. Now for yourself. You also, it is clear, are prone to Single Attachments. You also must be treated in the same way.’

‘Why, you are not going to marry me?’
He laughed aloud.

‘We are. Sister Phœbe consents to take you.’

‘Oh! Lord!’ There was a world of meaning in the interjection. And he laughed again. The Committee looked on in wonder. The young man was capable of laughing at anything.

‘Sister Phœbe is a maiden of great spiritual riches: one who will not expect any wasting of the soul in foolish fondness. Yours will be eminently a spiritual marriage, with no love either in the past or in the present. In your wife you will have a friend who will watch over you with the care of one farther advanced than yourself.’

‘And this paragon is Sister Phœbe—this Sister Phœbe—this identical Phœbe?’

They were mocking words ; everybody understood so much.

‘Your wife,’ the Master repeated, ‘will be Sister Phœbe, who consents to take you as her husband.’

‘Oh!’ Gilbert faced the bride elect. ‘It is as well to understand quite clearly what you mean, Master. You have never yet been married, I believe. It is a thousand pities. Your character wants just that one touch of human sympathy which comes of experience in love. There was a cardinal of the Romish Church ; he had once been married : he was unlike any other priest ever known ; he was the most human of creatures because, like yourself, he lived consistently with his creed, and, unlike yourself, he knew the meaning of love. Tell me again, Master, do you seriously order Cicely to marry this man, and me to marry this woman?’

‘ Since it is the only way to break down this Single Attachment, I do.’

Gilbert turned again to Phœbe. She was always hard-featured ; this morning she was harder than ever ; her mouth was set and her eyes were resolute. Heavens ! what a bride ! What an uncompromising bride ! She looked straight before her ; she pretended not to know that Gilbert was looking at her ; she said nothing.

‘ Sister Phœbe,’ said Gilbert : ‘ will you tell me before this Committee whether it is your desire to marry me ?’

‘ It is,’ she replied.

‘ And yours, Brother Silas, to marry this poor girl ?’

‘ It is.’

‘ Then, Master, I accuse these two persons of Single Attachments.’

‘ This is trifling,’ said the Master.

‘ It is nothing of the kind. I accuse them both of Single Attachments. The man has

been unable to conceal his jealousy ; in his way he loves the girl ; the woman has almost in so many words offered to marry me. A Single Attachment which is not returned is, I submit, even a more fatal disturber of Meditation than one which is returned. Do you accept my accusation, Master ? If not, you must be prepared for what will follow.'

A dead silence fell upon the Committee. For there was rebellion in that face.

Then Phœbe turned and looked upon his face. There was so much bitterness and loathing in it that the woman, though not given to blushing, changed colour ; she started to her feet ; she opened her mouth to speak, but she could not. The rage of the woman despised filled her soul ; she sat down again and bent her head. Did she console herself with the thought that to-morrow he would be hers—her very own ? Alas ! There are some things that we never know, and among these things is the kind of

married life which Sister Phœbe contemplated in the society of a man who was capable of Single Attachments.

‘Remember, Brother Gilbert,’ said the Master, ‘that this criticism has been conducted for your instruction, and in a spirit of truth and love. As for your marriage, that is ordered for you in the certainty that you will thus acquire the help and guidance you need. Sister Phœbe is rich in spiritual graces.’

Gilbert bowed. Then he looked round the Committee.

‘If nobody has any further observation to make——’

Nobody had apparently.

‘Before I go,’ Gilbert went on, ‘I should like to point out to you that you must have spent a great deal of time, all of you, in watching for, and picking out, these various faults and weaknesses. The note, the distinguishing feature of this Community is,

as the Master has insisted upon this morning, the isolation of the individual. He desires that we should be concentrated and rapt in our own meditations, the presence of the others being chiefly helpful in providing for each other the necessities of life, and in the prevention of the evils which attend the solitary. Now, instead of following out the Master's teaching, you have all been diligently spying out the doings and the ways of two of the members. I observe, therefore, for my own part, a low spiritual level in all of you which surprises and pains me. You are not what you pretend to be. As for the trifles you have brought forward, I have sufficiently replied to them. As to my conversations with this girl, it has been to me most instructive to study the most pure and innocent soul in this House. The only good I have received, as yet, from this Community has been through her. As for this proposed marriage——'

‘Nothing can be permitted on this point,’ the Master interrupted. ‘The thing has been determined by the Committee.’

‘Where is Cicely?’ asked Gilbert. ‘What have you done with her?’

‘She has been sent to her own room,’ the Master replied.

‘Out of your way,’ added Sister Phœbe.

To the amazement of the Committee, Gilbert strode straight up the Hall to the door of the women’s wing. He dared to invade the privacy of the gynæceum. What does the profligacy of the British nobleman respect? They heard him marching down the corridors; they heard him cry ‘Cicely! Cicely!’ They heard him mounting the stairs . . . and they looked at each other aghast.

Gilbert found the girl in her own room at the top of the house; a little room like his own, furnished in exactly the same manner. And at sight of the child’s cell, so plain and

mean, there fell upon him—not for the first time—an overwhelming pity for one who had been brought up with nothing beautiful or graceful or artistic at all about her except the flowers in the garden, the blossoms on the trees, and the clouds and sunshine of the sky. That so sweet a flower should grow up in a cell no better than is given to a prisoner in a gaol! But it was not a time for these regrets.

Cicely was sitting on her bed with folded hands—bewildered—disconsolate—tearful.

‘Oh, Gilbert, Gilbert!’ She started to her feet when he appeared. ‘Save me! save me! Oh, I cannot, I will not marry that man!’

‘My love! You shall not,’ he murmured, kissing her and laying his strong protecting arm about her. ‘I am come to save you. Quick, child! They may offer resistance; but I do not think they will. Take anything you value—if there is anything—and come with me.’

In the corner lay a desk of rosewood. Cicely took it up. 'It was my mother's. It is all I have of hers.'

Gilbert took it out of her hands. 'I will carry it. Come, child, you must trust yourself to me. Come, put on your hat.'

She obeyed. He led her down the stair and back into the Hall, where the Committee sat with minds astonished.

'Master,' he said, 'Cicely will go with me. She will stay with friends of mine until, at least, you have returned to your senses.'

Cicely laid her hands upon the Master's shoulders.

'Oh, dear Master!' she said. 'Oh, kind Master! Oh, my friend and protector and the friend of my mother. Think of her. Think of my father. Would they let me marry Brother Silas? Oh! I must leave you, but only for a time--only till you tell me that I can come back.'

She kissed his forehead and took Gilbert's hand again.

The Master rose, opened his mouth, looked round sadly, and sat down again in silence.

And the unhappy victims of a Single Attachment passed out of the door and through the porch, and were heard crunching the gravel without while the Committee sat helpless within.

CHAPTER X.

FLIGHT.

THE door slammed after them : it was always made to slam—it slammed of its own accord for everyone who passed through. This time it slammed reproachfully. It said to Gilbert : ‘I have slammed for the House nineteen years and more. I have done my duty by you since you have been here. I have taught you to despise noise. When you hear the heavy bell of the locomotive, the whistle of the steamer, the click of the electric car, the slamming of other doors, you will suffer nothing, thanks to me. And now I shall slam for you no more.’ An odd thing to

think of, but at supreme moments of life we very often turn to trifles. To Cicely the door conveyed no such message; she could think of nothing except that she was leaving the Community and the Master—the place where she discoursed with her dead mother and recalled the teachings of her dead father—the place which had been a convent, a seclusion, a school, a paradise to her.

She shrank back in the verandah.

‘Oh, Gilbert!’ she cried, trembling. ‘Oh! what shall I do—Outside? How can I live there?’

‘Trust yourself to me, dear child. Have no fear.’ He held her by the hand and gently led her along.

‘Oh! to leave the Master! And the sisters! And my flowers!’

‘There are other—and better—sisters waiting for you Outside, Cicely. And other—perhaps better—flowers. Come. Re-

member that if you stay there is Silas for you and Phœbe for me. Because I could not go away and leave you here alone, Cicely, you will not condemn me to Phœbe ?'

He looked so brave and strong, his grasp was so firm and warm, his eyes were so full of tenderness, that Cicely yielded : the woman yielded to the man and trusted him, and went out with him into the wide world of which she knew so little. She went with him ; and in another minute they were beyond the Community precinct and on the world's high road. She looked before her along the straight road with expectant eyes, as one who lands upon an unknown shore and fears to meet strange monsters and strange wild people—monoculous people, unipeds such as Mandeville saw—hairy satyrs : on an unknown shore never before discovered anything may be expected.

It was not difficult to read the thoughts of the young traveller.

‘ In the world,’ said Gilbert, ‘ you will find a good many things strange to your experience, which has been narrow. You must be patient and observant. You must not cry out with wonder or surprise. Look on at first in silence.’

‘ I will try. It is not difficult to be silent.’

‘ Not for you ; your soul dwells in a perpetual calm. But you will have to unlearn a great deal that you have been taught. For instance, the Master has told you, thinking always of Elevation, that every soul stands alone in space. I would rather hold that everyone stands in a crowd. You converse with your mother, who is dead, as with the Master—who is living. You are not alone, then. There is an endless chain of life running from parent to child ; there is the tie of love which can never be dissolved. Those who are worthy, Cicely, are only bound more closely by this tie. Your parents are not separated. Therefore they

are not alone. In this life we are bound to each other—brother, sister, lover, children, all ; so that there is never any solitude save for some hapless creatures who have no such tie. My child, you have never been alone all your life.'

'Yet the Master says so.'

'It is the inheritance of his former narrow creed—of which you know nothing. Have you ever felt alone, Cicely? But of course you have not.'

It is not usual for lovers to begin with theological discussion and metaphysical distinctions. But the circumstances of this case were not common. Few lovers chance upon a mistress educated in such opinions ; few girls have to make their entrance into society with such a past as Cicely possessed. Further, Gilbert was going to place this girl in the charge of one who was hard to please in the matter of girl.

Gilbert changed the subject, but returned

to it. The only way to teach a thing thoroughly is to repeat it over and over again, to rub it in, to keep on repeating it in different words.

‘Then about the Single Attachment,’ he went on lightly. ‘Why, you were always taught its wickedness. Yet, see! And now we are both turned out of the Community on account of having fallen into this wickedness.’ He stooped and kissed her hand, which he was still holding as if afraid she might turn and run back home. ‘Why, Cicely, who could help falling into this snare—this pitfall—when one talked every day with you and sat beside you and looked into your sweet serious face? Your name should be Cecilia, not Cicely. Well, my dear, in this terrible Outside, Single Attachments are considered the most charming things possible, also the most laudable things; young men are encouraged to form them, girls try to attract them, everything in Outside

is built upon the Single Attachment and on companionship. This, too, you shall learn.'

'Perhaps,' she replied. 'Must I forget everything?'

'Not everything, dear Cicely. You cannot forget your sweetness and your loveliness. But you may forget, as soon as you please, the rustics and boors of the House in which the Master is the only gentleman. I am sure that your father was an English gentleman, Cicely, because he has made the Master what he is, and you what you are. In speech, in manner and in mind, you are a gentlewoman. You are just returning with me to your own class, which is my class too. Perhaps we may even attach you, as the heralds say, to your own people. Perhaps you may turn out to be an heiress—who knows? A long-lost princess in your own right—who knows?'

'Indeed, Gilbert, I do not know. But I

do not understand, in the least, what you mean by heralds and heiresses.'

'No, you are just exactly as ignorant as Eve herself when she, too, stepped into Outside and looked round about her. But you will soon learn.'

It was a hot walk in the noontide glare of the road; there was no shade, no pleasantness, as in our English country of hedge, of wayside turf and wayside flowers: an open road and a lonely road, not even frequented by tramps, from whom the House exacted hard work before it granted relief.

Gilbert marched along, carrying the desk under his arm. Presently he found that he was walking too fast for his companion.

'I forgot,' he said. 'We have four miles in front of us. Are you tired already? Shall I walk on and bring you a carriage of some kind?'

'I am not tired, Gilbert. And oh! you must not leave me.'

‘There is no vehicle to be got nearer than the town. Let us beguile the time with stories and confessions. Tell me what you remember of your father. Had he any profession?’

‘He used to work in the garden. He knew all the flowers and the trees.’

‘Yes. But had he any profession?’

‘I don’t know what you mean. We all have our work. And he was a gardener.’

‘Do you know where he came from?’

‘Oh yes. He came from England.’

‘Did he ever tell you about his people — or your mother’s people — who they were?’

‘No. In the House we never talk about such things.’

‘Was he—was he—like Brother Silas, for instance?’

‘Like Brother Silas? Oh no! My father was a very quiet man, who lived retired and talked to no one but the Master

and me. He could not talk like Silas and the rest. He talked like you. He was always patient, though the others tried him sometimes. He would never criticise any one except quite privately.'

'Did he never tell you anything about himself?'

'Sometimes he talked as if I was going back to Outside. He taught me to read in case I went Outside. He seemed afraid of something for me. Then he would meditate and talk with my mother and would come back soothed and comforted. He always wanted to die—which is just to pass into the next stage, you know. Now he is gone and is with my mother again, unless one of them goes higher still before the other. And I don't think that will happen.'

'Yet you were told that every soul is alone. So your father told you nothing about himself in the old home. Did he leave you nothing?'

‘There is my mother’s desk which you are carrying. There was nothing more.’

‘Did he teach you to dance?’

‘No, I learned that by myself. He used to play, and I used to dance in the Hall when I was a little child while he played. I have always danced for amusement and for soothing.’

‘You learned to read, but you have no books; you no longer read—in fact, you never have read: you know only what your father taught you orally; you are a living example, my dear child, of what very little use reading is after all. You know, in fact, a great deal. You are an accomplished gardener: what a field is covered by that science alone! You can dance, and you can sing. You can hold intercourse with the world of the dead, which no one who can read ever succeeded in doing. You are a profound hypnotist, though you do not know the meaning of the word. You are as full

of graces as any girl out of a fashionable school. You will make the men fall in love with you far more easily than any professional beauty——'

'Gilbert, I don't understand what you mean.'

'The road stretches out straight before us and the sun is strong, Cicely. That is enough for anybody to understand. Sunshine and a long road and our two selves on the road. Did you ever hear the story of the Fairy and the Princess? I will tell you, to beguile the way—the happy way. The Fairy was a kind-hearted creature; she took the Princess away when she was a baby, and she placed her in an island where no one ever came and the people lived quite by themselves. They were simple, rather silly people for the most part, and not too well bred; they held a very beautiful faith, much too good for them—namely, that by the simple process of getting outside their own

bodies, they could rise to unheard-of heights. They forgot that the soul, like the body, must be constantly nourished and fed with thoughts and instruction. They did get outside the body, but they starved the soul, and so they never got any higher. But the Princess and the King of that island used to converse together, and in this way enriched and nourished their souls—so that they did really rise, and that Princess grew mentally taller, taller, taller, till she far outgrew all the rest. Then, because to stay longer among this lower and baser folk would have made this sweet Princess deteriorate, the Fairy sent a Prince to her, who said : “ Come with me. I will take you back to the real world, which has great need of your Royal Highness.” Then the Princess arose and took his hand, and they went out together.’

‘ And afterwards ? Oh, Gilbert, nobody except you ever told me stories !’

‘ Afterwards, dear Cicely ? Well, I think

you shall finish the story by yourself. The road still stretches out far before us, and the sun is bright and warm. It warms one through and through. Love is the sun, and it can never be too bright and strong. Now tell me more.'

'I have told you enough about myself,' said Cicely. 'The more I tell you the more you turn it all to praise and flattery. You must not, Gilbert, unless you want to make me ashamed.'

'You have but to command,' he said. 'I will praise you no more, my dear ; I will only look at you.'

They walked on in silence for a space. Presently Cicely spoke again.

'Where are you going, Gilbert?'

'We are going first to the town of Aldermanbury, which eats up all your fruit and vegetables. There, my child, as I told you, is staying at this moment, by a rare and blessed chance, my best and oldest friend. I

had already promised to take you to see her. Now I shall ask her to receive you. She will be prepared to love you first because I love you — such a good and faithful friend she is. To-morrow, of course, she will have learned to love you for your own sweet sake.'

She pondered for a few moments over this announcement. Then she asked, timidly—'Have you a Single Attachment for her as you have for me, Gilbert?'

'No, Cicely. You do not understand, as yet, the full meaning of the Single Attachment. You will master that matter before long. There can only be one real Single Attachment for a man in his lifetime. However, this lady stands in the place of a sister to me. She is married, though her marriage was—well—not one of the happiest.'

'I have listened to some of the married members,' said Cicely. 'I have heard them criticising each other very plainly. I suppose they married in order to tell each other

their faults. I shall never mind your criticising me, Gilbert, as much as you please.'

A thousand epigrams might be neatly turned in answer to this innocent speech. Gilbert refrained from even the most obvious. 'You shall criticise me, dear child. It shall be your duty. It shall be my privilege to listen. I want no end of criticising. We all do. It is the crying want of the age. In fact, before I met you, I was thinking of becoming a poet, in order to get plenty of this wholesome criticism.'

At this point he remembered suddenly, and very disagreeably, the duty that awaited him in a day or two. What right had he to make love, when he was bound to attempt the life of another man? His face fell; it became overcast; the light and sunshine went out of his eyes.

Cicely saw the change, and shuddered. 'Gilbert!' she cried, 'what has happened to you? Oh! you hurt me when you look like

that. I thought it had gone—that look. Your soul has become black. Oh! Gilbert, have you forgotten—— What was it?’ She stopped; she put up her hand; she lifted her face; for a moment—only a moment—life went out of it: she had gone to ask her mother for that message again. Then she came back to life. ‘What must be done shall be done, but not by your hands,’ she repeated solemnly. ‘I know not what it is, Gilbert; but can you doubt my mother—my own mother?’

He inclined his head. ‘I must try to assume that faith, Cicely, even though it sometimes fails me, otherwise I should be doubting you and the sender of that message. What manner of woman must she be, capable of giving such a daughter to the world?’

Apparently faith really did return for his support, for his face resumed its brightness.

‘I *will* believe,’ he said resolutely, ‘though

why I should, the Lord knows—but I *will* believe.'

They approached the city of Aldermanbury. The world grew larger. Here lived, collected together, but not united, thousands of human beings without the pale of the Community. The houses, scattered at first, and mean and squalid, grew closer together and cleaner of aspect, for the suburbs of Aldermanbury are not the best and worthiest part of the city. Then they came to the streets, with the shops and the electric cars and the trams and the people. And now Gilbert had to lead the girl by the arm ; for she was like one who has been blind and has suddenly recovered her sight, and sees men as trees walking, and knows not the things she sees, or their proportions, or their distances, or their dangers, or what they mean at all. He led her through the streets to the hotel, where the hall was filled with men sitting about and talking. He led her up

the stairs to the first floor, and to a set of rooms furnished in a manner amazing to the child who had never seen any furniture worthy of the name; and in a long, low chair, with a little boy in her lap, sat a lady whose appearance filled the girl with terror, by reason of her dress and her queenly look.

‘Gilbert!’ she cried. ‘You have brought me Cicely?’ She rose and held out her hand. ‘You are Cicely, my dear?’

‘I have brought her, Dorabyn. She has left the House with me. Will you receive her?’

‘Of course I will. You have left the House, Cicely? Who are her guardians, Gilbert?’

‘She has no guardians, no property, no relations—nothing, except this desk.’ He laid it on the table. ‘That is her sole inheritance.’

‘Oh! And she is quite free to leave the

place? I suppose no one will dispute her right?’

‘Quite free. In fact, they have turned us out. Cicely was ordered to marry a rustic, a shepherd—a swain, lovesick for his Amaryllis—who devours pork and beans; and I was ordered to marry a milkmaid—not a “Hey Dolly! ho Dolly! Dolly shall be mine.” Not that kind of Dolly at all—an inferior kind—a harder, more elderly, bonier kind. But—well—another time. That is the situation, Dorabyn. We’ve run away.’

‘And you’ve brought her to me. Quite right, Gilbert. Will you stay with me, Cicely?’

‘If you please,’ she replied, with a little hesitation. ‘If—if—Gilbert does not go away.’

‘He will stay too. This is my little boy—you will like to play with him. And——’

She suddenly realised the enormity of the dress, and cold shudders seized her. ‘And,

Gilbert,' she said, 'as there is a great deal to be done between this and the evening, you had better leave us by ourselves. Go away and return at half-past seven. In the meantime you might also get yourself apparelled in Christian guise. At present you look like a shabby gamekeeper.'

Gilbert retired.

Lady Osterley called her maid. 'Doughty,' she said, by way of explanation and apology, 'this is the peculiar dress of a religious House in which this young lady has been brought up. Now that she has left the House, she will leave the dress. We must take her in hand at once. Do the best you can. Let me have her decently dressed by the evening.'

The maid neither shivered nor shuddered nor uttered interjections. She reserved these for her next conversation with the nurse. She just lifted Cicely's hair, which ought to have fallen to her waist, and

suggested dexterously a more becoming way of dressing it ; then she surveyed curiously the figure or model before her. It presented, she observed, great possibilities. Then she put a pin between her lips. This is an emblematic ceremony among ladies' maids and dressmakers, and betokens strict attention to business.

CHAPTER XI.

MARRIAGE FOR ELEVATION.

THE Committee sat looking in each other's faces in silent confusion. Brother Silas, by the jerking of his arms and legs, showed that he was struggling for words; Sister Phœbe sat with rage equally unspeakable—the rage of the slighted woman—stamped upon her face. For the rest there was doubt as well as confusion. What was to be done? There was no Rule concerning mutiny and disobedience. Had Phœbe known of the alleged immuring of monk and nun, I think she would have proposed that the rebels should be brought back by force and im-

mured, or, at least, put under the platform and there nailed up. Unfortunately, she knew neither ecclesiastical history nor ecclesiastical slanders.

Presently the Master spoke, but in a low voice, as if to himself. 'They will come back to us,' he said. 'My child cannot leave me thus. The matter concerns her soul. She will endure anything in that cause. So too will the young man, who is reasonable and intelligent.'

He lapsed into silence. They waited ten minutes. Yet the rebels returned not.

'I think,' said the Master again, 'that some one might go out and bid them return. Not you, Brother Silas, nor you, Sister Phœbe.'

'If they come back,' said Sister Phœbe, venomously, 'they must obey. They must be made to obey. Else there would be no use in having a Committee at all.'

'Go, Sister Euphemia,' said the Master.

‘You will speak very kindly to them. Tell them that we will overlook their disobedience and reconsider the question of marriage.’

‘Poor dears!’ Sister Euphemia rose to obey. ‘I shall find them crying together under the trees somewhere. They will come back, I dare say, if they are not to be forced into marriage horrible to them. Master, there’s some things even you don’t understand: one of them is that a woman would rather die than marry a man she doesn’t like. I would myself; such were my feelings when I was young. You will have to do more than forgive them if they come back.’

‘They shall be made to obey,’ said Sister Phœbe again. ‘First, they must obey. After that, I will take care of Brother Gilbert.’ She looked, indeed, as if she would take the fondest, the most loving and tender care of him. ‘As for the girl, she should be corrected first and handed over to a husband afterwards.’

The Master looked at her with much surprise. 'Tell them,' he said sternly, 'exactly what I have ordered you to tell them.'

Sister Euphemia vanished.

'There is, perhaps,' the Master continued slowly, 'something that I do not comprehend in the marriage tie, which may make it in some cases a help, rather than a hindrance. The Single Attachment, I understand, may hinder by demanding too much thought each for the other; perhaps, however, a marriage ordered by the Committee may hinder by reason of discontent, or resentment, or even'—he looked at rustical Silas and remembered the dainty delicateness of his child—'even of positive repulsion. My experience in such matters is slender.'

'Let them obey,' said Sister Phœbe, while Silas jerked himself into convulsions.

Five minutes later, Sister Euphemia returned. 'I looked for them,' she said,

a little breathless, 'under the trees; they were not there: one of the gardeners saw them walking away along the road.' She resumed her place and began to cry. 'They have left us,' she said. 'Oh! they have left us. We have lost them. They have gone Outside. And that tender lamb who has never seen anything and knows nothing!' She wiped her eyes and turned venomously to Sister Phœbe. 'And now,' she snapped, 'I hope you are all satisfied with your morning's work!'

'Send some one after them,' said Phœbe, springing to her feet. 'Let three or four of the brothers run after them and bring them back. That girl has bewitched him. Oh! I have seen her. I have watched her tricks. If she'd lived all her life Outside, she couldn't have been more artful. Silas, if you've the spirit of a sheep left in you, get up and fight this man for your girl. Coward! get up and take a stick and bring

him back again. You—an American—afraid of an Englishman! Shame! Or bring the girl. He'll follow then. He'll follow wherever she goes. Get up, Silas. Coward! Log! Oh! you've got no spirit left at all. You want to marry this girl, and you let another man carry her off! Coward! Shall I go myself with a stick after them?'

'Gracious!' cried Sister Euphemia. 'I thought the Committee were to countenance no Single Attachments. And here is Sister Phœbe appealing to Silas's Single Attachment for that dear child. I've seen him, too. I've watched, too, for months to see it growing and growing. And I've watched another thing, too.' She nodded viciously at Sister Phœbe, who now sat down and panted. 'Oh yes, another thing, which I shall tell in good time.'

'Let no one stir,' said the Master. 'We welcome all who come and are willing to work with us and learn to meditate—we

keep none against their will. Our dear young Sister Cicely has been with us all her life; she has never known any other kind of life; I fear she will be strange and unhappy. Outside has many dangers for innocent girls. I always hoped that she would never leave us. I thought that she was happy and desired nothing—I never suspected this Single Attachment.'

'What does every girl desire?' asked Sister Euphemia. 'Cicely wanted love without knowing what she wanted. The same want made me unhappy enough, Lord knows! She got what she wanted, and you tried to take it away. She wanted love, and you offered her—THAT!'

She did not say what, but she pointed to the bridegroom elect.

'If she chooses,' the Master continued, hanging his head sorrowfully, 'she must—leave us—leave us.'

The Committee respected the Master's

grief, and were silent. But Phœbe, perhaps with excess of sympathy, perhaps still agitated by the jealousy of the despised woman, snorted and choked.

Presently the Master lifted his head again and spoke. 'Perhaps I was wrong,' he said, 'to think of marrying this child at all. She was happy in the love of the young man. Perhaps it would have been a help instead of a hindrance. They might have gone on loving each other as brother and sister. Her sainted mother found marriage a help. There are great possibilities in that young man——'

'Ruined by his infatuation,' said Sister Phœbe.

'Brother and sister!' Sister Euphemia, the experienced, scoffed. 'Much you know about it, Master!'

'I shall leave it to her mother. This night I shall converse with her as usual. I shall ask for her guidance—perhaps for her

rebuke. Yes'—his face cleared ; he became hopeful—' I shall leave it with her. She has been—I know not why, much occupied of late with the concerns of the House. I shall put the matter entirely in her hands—the safety and the well-being of her daughter. She will tell me what to do.'

'Cicely wants love,' Sister Euphemia repeated. 'It is not safe with some natures—gentle, delicate natures—to rob them of love. That was done to me—and I have been here twenty years in consequence. Your method, Master, of preventing Single Attachments by regulated marriages may be very good for coarse and common souls ; but not for girls like Cicely and me.'

'If she comes back she must obey the Committee,' said Phœbe, still jealous for order. 'Are we to have no authority in such a matter as this, simply because the Master talks with this rebellious girl's mother ? The Committee have ordered the

girl to marry Brother Silas and the man to marry me. If she comes back the Committee must be obeyed.'

The Master looked up again in surprised disapproval. It was the first time in the history of the Community that any claim to power had been put forward by a member of Committee. Was he not the founder and the prophet and the dictator of the Community?

'I shall wait,' he said, assuming authority. 'I shall decide after consultation with her mother what shall be done.'

He looked round him. No one replied. 'Let us now,' he continued, 'proceed to the business of the day. We have next to consider the case of the man Charles Lee. I do not ask you to criticise this brother, because criticism in his case would be idle. If a man desires to become a member of this House, the way is plain. He must first of all conform to our Rule. This man came

to us six or seven weeks ago. He understood the plain Rule of the House. He desired, he said, above all things, Elevation ; he professed readiness to forget the Past—in his case, I fear, a Past of wickedness ; he said he was willing to work for the subjugation, the health, and the fatigue of the body ; also for the maintenance of the Community ; he promised to meditate daily, or, at least, to endeavour after Meditation. These,' continued the Master, 'were his promises. His manners were those of an English aristocrat. I confess that I was pleased to find our simple Community attracting a man of that position willing to forget the Past. Mostly, like the Apostles, we have been a simple folk. He came, therefore, as you know. He has been among us about six or seven weeks. How has he carried out these promises ? He chose the garden for his work, but he has never done a stroke of real work : he only pretends ; he sits about

in the shade; he has no intercourse with the Community; he despises our simple, yet plentiful, meals; he does not even make an attempt at Meditation; on the contrary, he gets up and goes out. Where does he go? I was informed when in Aldermanbury last week that one of our members is seen nightly at a certain saloon where they play cards for money and drink whisky. What are we to do with such a man?’

‘Expel him,’ said the Committee, with the unanimity of the stage. In fact, Brother Charles was cordially hated by everyone in the place.

‘If there were any hope I would bear with him. But there seems none: his heart is hard; his spirit is black and gloomy; he belongs to the Devil, not to us.’

‘Expel him,’ cried the Committee again.

‘It is a standing mockery of our Endeavours after the Higher Life. How can we, with our aims, entertain among us one

who still wallows in Outside? Let us, then, without criticism, which would be lost upon such a man, call him before us and order him to leave the House—say on Saturday.’

All assented except Sister Phœbe, still mutinous. ‘I should like,’ she said, ‘to let him know our individual opinions. What is the good of a Committee if we are to have no voice in anything?’

‘Brother Silas’—the Master paid no attention to this interruption—‘bring Charles Lee before us.’

The offending brother appeared and stood at the bottom of the table. Nothing more incongruous was ever seen in any court of justice than the trial or the judgment of this man—so calm, so lofty in appearance, so completely contemptuous of the court was the prisoner; so simple, so rustic, was the appearance of the judges. He slightly bowed and waited.

‘Charles Lee,’ said the Master, ‘when you came to us, you told me that your simple desire in entering this Community was to endeavour after Elevation. I believed your statement ; it was manifest from your appearance and your atmosphere that spiritually you were very low down indeed ; you carried about with you, in fact, the atmosphere of a lower world ; it is such an atmosphere as was anciently described, for lack of a better word, as sulphurous. I admitted you, subject to the simple Rules of the House. Let me remind you of them. They were three in number. First, that all must work ; next, that the Past is to be entirely set aside and forgotten ; thirdly, that all must aim at rising to a higher level by Meditation. You promised to obey these three Rules.’

Mr. Charles Lee inclined his head.

‘You have now been with us for seven weeks. I am willing to make great allow-

ance for difficulties at the outset, but I expect——'

'The Committee expects,' interrupted Phœbe, stung into self-assertion.

'I expect, I say, to find an honest attempt at carrying out the Rules. It is now quite certain that you have made no such attempt, and that you do not intend to make any such attempt. You have done no work since you came ; you have not earned one farthing for the House ; you have made no attempt to raise yourself. About you still clings—I perceive it plainly—the sulphurous atmosphere of your level. Your soul is black through and through. I can see no single gleam of light in it to show a better purpose. As for meditating, you have not even begun to understand what it means. You spend your evenings in the world, in places where they play cards and drink whisky—places called saloons and dives. I have to tell you, therefore, that we cannot allow you to

remain in this House. It is now Thursday : you can stay here, if you have arrangements to make, until Saturday. On that day we shall lock up your room and you will no longer be allowed in the Hall. Do you understand ?'

The man bowed his head slightly, without the least change of countenance. Then he looked round the Committee as if expecting a few remarks from them.

'I have observed in this brother,' said Sister Phœbe, 'a pride intolerable. They say that in his own country he is a British nobleman ; this is not the place for the superior airs of that profligate class. Let him go back to his own people.'

'You can depart,' said the Master.

Mr. Charles Lee bowed again, but continued to wait.

'He finds fault with the food—as good food as ever was placed before people,' another member interposed—the man with

the rasping voice. 'He sits at table as if the rest of us were mud beneath his feet.'

'You can depart,' said the Master. But the man called Charles Lee inclined his head to the last speaker, and turned again to Sister Phoebe, who showed further intentions.

'He should never have been admitted,' she said, 'without inquiry. Why did he come here? What has he done? It isn't for Elevation that he comes here. What has he done? Is the Community to be the refuge of the broken-down British aristocracy? Let them go and dump their vices and their pride somewhere else.'

'Be so good, sir, as to withdraw immediately,' said the Master.

Mr. Charles Lee inclined his head and walked out. The blow was unexpected, and it was fatal. There was but one chance left—to remain quiet, unsuspected in this place

unsuspecting. And now this chance was gone. Yet he showed no emotion whatever. With just such an air, with such a smile, with such contempt, did the Marquis de la Vieille Roche receive sentence of death by guillotine from the Revolutionary Tribunal: a sentence that would not be carried out because outside the mob waited for the prisoners, roaring and shouting and singing for more blood—more blood; the mob who were to murder him, out of hand. With just such an air, I say, so cold, so calm, so unmoved, this man walked down the Hall and out of the porch. For that raging mob substitute the whole police force of the United States, all provided with an accurate description and a portrait of him; and his appearance was unmistakable—he had never endeavoured to disguise himself at all. For the roars and shouting of the maddened mob of Paris substitute the calm, cold voice of many-handed Justice, saying, ‘Come, thou

man of blood and destruction, I will have life for life.'

'The atmosphere is more fragrant,' said the Master, sniffing. 'The presence of that man was like the breathing of the air in the worlds below. How low, I know not. He is not one of those who simply fails to rise: he has fallen, his former pride remains; there are those—above—who would help him if they could. I think they knew him formerly. What say they? That he was a British nobleman? I know not. When I lived at home I knew nothing of noblemen. Well—he is gone. I think he will remain in this world very little longer. They are mostly taken away when they prove to be hardened against everything.'

He paused and looked round the table.

'One duty remains,' he said, with something of a smile in the corners of his eyes, but that might be the observer's fancy. 'One duty. Not in itself a painful duty,

but a necessary duty. I have to bring back to a sense of their position two of our own body—to rescue them from a grievous temptation. Brothers and sisters, we must proceed to criticise Sister Phœbe.’

Sister Phœbe jumped in her place; she opened her mouth; she shut it again; she folded her hands; she sat bolt upright.

‘I have observed,’ the Master continued, ‘certain passages—or indications—in our justly — hitherto justly — respected sister which make me uneasy. They lead me to believe that her thoughts of late have been much occupied with things which do not become one of her advanced profession. Especially have I observed in her a weakness—let us call it a weakness, not a moral or a spiritual fall—which may be criticised. In a word, the same weakness which we have deplored in our two members who have rebelled—a Single Attachment.’

‘I, too,’ said Sister Euphemia quickly,

‘have observed this Single Attachment. It began when Brother Gilbert first came among us. She sat nearly opposite him at meals. I observed how she put chops and kidneys before him, because he won’t eat pork and beans, which Brother Silas would eat all day long if he could.’

‘And all night,’ said Brother Silas readily, and not ashamed. ‘And between meals.’

‘She makes tea cakes for him in the kitchen—much better tea cakes than the rest of us get. She makes coffee on purpose for him, because he won’t drink the muddy coffee that is good enough for us.’

‘Oh ! oh !’ murmured three or four.

‘And she makes tea for him in a special teapot—the best Oolong, because he doesn’t like our strong family Ceylon. And she waylays him in the verandah, and follows him about with her eyes. And she’s just spiteful about Cicely, whom the boy loves. Oh ! and I’ve heard her, myself, tell him the kind

of man she should like to marry, just describing himself. Oh! it's too bare-faced. And then for her to sit up and criticise that poor dear child because her nature told her that if she wanted Elevation she must get it through Love!

Sister Phœbe sat bolt upright, with folded arms. She turned her head, but made no reply to these charges.

'I am not alone, then,' said the Master, 'in the painful suspicion that was awakened in me by her evident desire to marry Brother Gilbert. Yet I was considering that brother's case, and did not, till afterwards, understand what this eagerness might mean. Your own case, Sister Phœbe, must be seriously taken in hand.'

'It must be cured,' said Sister Euphemia, 'if we are ever to get that dear boy back again, or that sweet child.'

'I now leave, for a moment, our Sister Phœbe, and turn,' the Master continued, 'to

Brother Silas.' The brother turned as red as one of his own turkeys. 'The eagerness which he displayed, in offering to cure Cicely of her Single Attachment by marrying her himself, should have opened my eyes to the fact that he is himself a young man and likely to be carried away by the loveliness of a woman.'

'And such loveliness, too !' said Sister Euphemia, again bursting in. 'You are quite right, dear Master. I've seen it for months past. I know the signs. His shoulder lurches when he passes her ; his eyes turn after her and follow her ; he gets red when Gilbert talks to her ; he hates Gilbert——'

'He's an Englishman,' Silas explained.

'It's disgraceful ignorance to hate the poor man for what he can't help. You might as well hate a man because he's got a hump on his back. You hate him because Cicely doesn't—that's your reason ; and because you can't

please her fancy and he can. Pretty reasons, all of them, for a member of this Community to nourish in his soul ! Where are you in Meditation ? Going down, brother Silas, going down. I haven't met you, up above, not for months.'

The Master resumed. ' Brother Silas, you are a good worker ; you obey the Rule of the House faithfully ; you stand very high in our esteem ; you meditate regularly and, I hope, profitably. It has been, however, I doubt not, most injurious to your Elevation to be always thinking about this young girl. It would have been still more injurious in the years to come were you hampered with a wife of whom you would be always thinking, and concerning whom you would be always anxious. I do not, Brother Silas, greatly blame you in this matter. The girl has been to me as a daughter : I doubt not that to you it has become, for the time, impossible for

her to be as a sister. This must be seen to, in your own interests.'

Brother Silas listened guiltily. He was, as you know, one of the inarticulate. Every speech, however short, troubled him. As has been seen, he had fallen so completely into the habit of silence that he was not only unready but almost incapable of conversation. For the moment, he could think of no reply whatever. Nor, indeed, has he yet, after many months, been able to think of a reply which would have been suitable. It was quite true, you see, that he had, in an instinctive, taurine fashion, entertained an amorous disposition towards Cicely; and, also in an instinctive, taurine fashion, entertained a profound jealousy of Gilbert. But he made no reply.

'All earthly passions, brother,' said the Master, with the cheerfulness of one who at seventy-five has long since left these things behind him, 'all earthly passions, and espe-

cially Single Attachments, must here be cast aside : we rise alone ; we must have no such distractions to turn us back, no such earthly affections to pull us down. Forget these distractions, Brother Silas. Forget them, Sister Phœbe. Cast them aside, as part of the forgotten Past, and press on, alone.

‘ But,’ he added, after a pause, ‘ it must be remembered that these two have shown themselves peculiarly open to the temptation of the Single Attachment. My brothers and sisters, many of our Community are still in the age which feels this temptation. It is a most insidious temptation ; it takes all kinds of forms ; it suggests all kinds of excuses : we call it the worship of an ideal, but we ought to have no other ideal but a Perfect Self ; we call it the sacrifice of self, but we do this when we work for each other, not when we fall in love, as it is called Outside : we call it the defence of the helpless—we defend the helpless here. The temptation

presents itself, I say, in a thousand forms : behind the mask there stands the demon of self-gratification. We must guard against the Single Attachment. On account of this temptation we have just lost—I hope for a season only—a desirable brother and my own spiritual daughter. Let us lose no more. Above all, let the Committee set an example to the Community and show the members how to overcome their weakness. For which reason we will remove from the Committee, for the present, Sister Phœbe and Brother Silas.’

He looked around. They all murmured assent, except Sister Phœbe herself, whose cheek was flushed and whose hands trembled. They murmured assent. How easy it is for a committee, or for a chapter, to assent to the discipline of an erring brother or a sinful sister ! Thus readily did the monks of Westminster assent to the discipline of a brother.

‘The only way open to us,’ the Master went on, ‘is to make, for these two, Single Attachments henceforward impossible. I take it for granted that Brother Silas has no such feeling towards Sister Phœbe, nor she to him. If Brother Gilbert was Sister Phœbe’s ideal husband it would be difficult to find any one more unlike that dream than Brother Silas. And certainly, in the appearance or the character of Sister Phœbe, Silas will never be reminded of Cicely. They shall be married, therefore, and that without the least delay, lest a worse thing happen to them.’

The bride and bridegroom elect looked at each other. Aversion and disgust were in their faces. Yes ; they would certainly be cured for ever of any leaning towards the Single Attachment.

‘Do you obey my ruling in this matter, Brother Silas ?’ the Master asked. ‘If you do not, the doors are open for you, as for our

late Brother Charles. You can leave the House and go away.'

Brother Silas grunted something meant for assent. Whither could he go? Where else could he find such a Home, with three square meals every day and the management of a farm fully provided with machinery and buildings and stock? Alas! there was no other place for him. He looked at his bride with eyes of disgust and loathing. He grunted huskily his acceptance of the terms, and hung his head.

'It is well,' said the Master. 'There will be no attachment to draw your thoughts out of yourself, Brother Silas. You will begin to ascend again. I hope that we may meet in higher worlds before long.'

He turned to the bride elect. 'Sister Phœbe, do you accept?'

She, too, reflected on the consequence of refusal. After eight years her place among her own people was filled up. She knew not

even what had become of them. The New England farmers move West for the most part: 'West' is a very vague word, almost as vague and vast and uncertain as 'Outside.' Where would she get so many comforts and such little work and the care of so lovely a dairy? Nowhere. Life with Silas for a companion would be terrible, but not so terrible as starvation. With dry lips and burning cheeks she murmured her consent.

'You do well to obey,' said the Master, with more severity than the brethren generally observed in his manner. Then he began again to preach, and his voice rolled like music as he spoke. 'In the married state, Sister Phœbe, you will probably learn more than mere obedience to the Community. In obedience to your husband you will find a powerful assistance in subduing the rebellious spirit which we have of late observed in you. Be a good wife, and you will doubtless before long regain the levels which you have clearly

lost. My dear friends'—the Master rose—
'we have this day had a meeting, the like of
which, for excitement and rebellion, I never
remember since we first began. I trust it
will not interfere too much with Meditation.
The work of the Committee is completed.'

The Master walked away.

The Committee rose as well and slowly
dissolved without speaking to the bridal pair.
There were left at last only the bride, the
bridegroom, and Sister Euphemia.

'I congratulate you both,' said Euphemia,
with a cheerful brow. 'This is a joyful
wedding; a happy wedding; a most beautiful
wedding. Oh, what a thing it is to have a
wedding without an atom of love in it!
What a beautiful thing it is for bride and
bridegroom to hate even looking at each
other! No nasty love to keep you on the
earth when you ought to be soaring high in
the heavens; no kissing and billing and
cooing; no interference of pretty things to

do and say and think about for each other. My dear children, I've been in love myself. I know what Single Attachments mean. Oh, dear me ! I know. And how they want always to be together—dragging each other down. But as for you—you—you ! Why, the higher you fly upwards, both of you, the farther off from each other you'll get !—one more reason for getting as high up as you possibly can. Ah ! what a beautiful thing is marriage in this House !

The happy pair looked at each other guiltily, but they made no reply.

‘ Now, there's Gilbert, the best boy I ever saw and the handsomest : he's gone off with Cicely—the best and sweetest girl in the whole world—with Cicely. And he'll be in love with her all his life. Very likely there'll be children——’

‘ Don't be undelicate,’ said Brother Silas, colouring.

‘ Children ; and he'll love them, too. And

so he'll stay in this very identical level world—the world that is—all his life, and he won't desire any better world, till death parts him and her. Poor Gilbert! poor lost Cicely! while as for you——' she chirruped, and ran out of the Hall.

Left alone, the man turned away his head and held out his hand.

'Phœbe!' he said.

She turned away her head as well, but gave him her hand.

'Silas!' she murmured.

And so they were man and wife, and all temptation to Single Attachments was removed once for all.

And this proves that sometimes the most solemn and serious of men will do the most humorous things.

END OF VOL. II.





